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F. VIGDOROVA

*Diary
of a School-
Teacher*



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**TRANSLATED FROM THE RUSSIAN
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FOREWORD

When I think of my childhood, the first thing that comes to my mind is school. I loved school; my first thought on waking up in the morning and my last on going to bed at night were of school. Even the summer holidays were one long period of waiting for the day when at last I would be back in the familiar class-room with my schoolmates and, above all, with our class mistress Anna Ivanovna.

All the brightest moments of my childhood were in one way or another connected with school. Although twenty-five years have passed since then, I still remember how eagerly we drank in those first lessons about the structure of the earth and about the voyages of Nansen, Amundsen and Sedov. Even grammar was exciting. We looked forward eagerly to every lesson. The hours slipped by unnoticed and we did not rush out of the class-room when the bell rang as children usually do. We enjoyed studying.

School taught us the meaning of friendship. By the time we were eleven and twelve we had learned that the important thing is not only to do well oneself, but to see that the whole class has good marks. A lesson left undone by any of us, and a poor mark on anyone's report card distressed us all. I still remember the lively and interesting form meetings we had, and how faithfully we adhered to the decisions we adopted at them. Once when Anna Ivanovna was ill we actually carried on for a whole week without her. She sent us the exercises and we did our lessons diligently. Nobody could say that our class did not behave properly. Nor was that because we were such model children. We had our share of mischief, but it never occurred to anyone to behave badly just because our teacher was absent.

Another thing I carried away with me from school and which I shall probably retain all my life is the deepest of respect for teachers. Not long ago, as I was looking through an old bound volume of the children's magazine *Pioneer*, I came across a question-

naire entitled "What do you want to be?" and among the other answers, my own reply to that question. "I want to be a teacher like Anna Ivanovna," I had written. I was nine at that time.

I doubt whether my decision to become a teacher had really crystallized as early as that. I would rather say that I and several of my classmates gave that answer because we sincerely loved our teacher and wanted to be like her in everything. Besides, my own father was a school-teacher and at home the teaching profession was held in the highest esteem.

As we grew up we became more and more aware of the indelible imprint left by school; we realized how dear everything connected with school was to us, how we looked up to our teachers and drank in every word they said. And many of us decided that there was no finer or more useful calling than that of teacher.

I too chose teaching. At eighteen I took over my first class in the newly-founded, fast-growing city of Magnitogorsk. Not long before, the site of the city had been open steppe with no sign of human habitation except a few isolated cottages near Mount Magnitnaya. In old Russia nobody had given any thought to the vast deposits of iron ore concealed in the depths of this mountain. With the First Five-Year Plan, however, the place was turned into a giant construction site. From all parts of the Soviet Union people flocked to this once uninhabited, undeveloped spot to build a city and a great works to turn out metal for the Land of Socialism in Construction.

The works grew rapidly and next to it, the town with its blocks of flats and schools. In one of these I began work as a teacher.

I confess that at first it seemed to me that I had made an irreparable mistake. The work was extremely difficult. The children were hard to manage, they were inattentive and fidgety and they would not do their home-work. I did not know what to do, and several times I was on the verge of giving it up. But older comrades, teachers with many years' experience, came to my assistance. They attended my lessons, invited me to sit in at theirs, and in general gave me a great deal of help and practical advice, and always with such tact that I had the feeling of having found the way out of each difficult situation myself.

Gradually I stopped thinking of leaving school. From day to day the work became easier and more interesting. And although

new difficulties continued to crop up, it gave me pleasure to overcome them. Throughout this period I kept a diary in which I recorded everything that happened in the class-room: my talks with the children, my impressions of their personalities, notes on their characters, and other observations.

Some time later I returned to Moscow where I finished an institute and began teaching literature and Russian in the senior forms of secondary school. At the same time I wrote several articles on education for *Pravda* and later for the youth paper *Komsomolskaya Pravda*. In Moscow, too, I made a point of observing the work of more experienced teachers. I wrote articles about school life, I made trips to other towns and met a great many people, all the while coming to appreciate more and more the important role played in life by a good school and a good teacher. I came to realize how often we are guided in later life by the counsel of those who taught us in our childhood. I always remember what one war hero said on learning that he had been honoured with the second Hero of the Soviet Union award and that his bust in bronze was to be set up in his birthplace:

"It is not I but my teacher who deserves this honour. Whatever good there is in me I owe to him."

This, I think, well reflects the Soviet people's respect for the teacher and the school.

Honoured Teacher of the R.S.F.S.R. Ivan Ivanovich Zelentsov, who teaches literature in a Moscow school, once showed me a few of the letters he had received from his pupils. Some were from people he had taught twenty or thirty years before, some had been written in front-line dug-outs during the Great Patriotic War. But the letter that impressed me most was a note written twenty minutes before its author left for the front. He had dropped in to say good-bye to his former teacher and not finding him at home had jolted down a brief note of farewell. As I read the words of warmth and affection I thought once again how deep must be the trace a good teacher leaves on his pupils' heart and mind if their thoughts turn to him so many years later in moments when one naturally turns to those who are nearest and dearest.

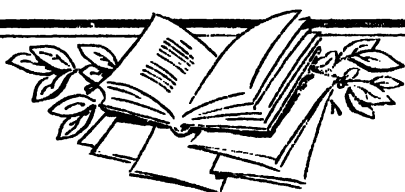
Later I wrote a feature-story about a young school-teacher for *Komsomolskaya Pravda*. When I met her again a year later, she told me she had received a great many letters from people who

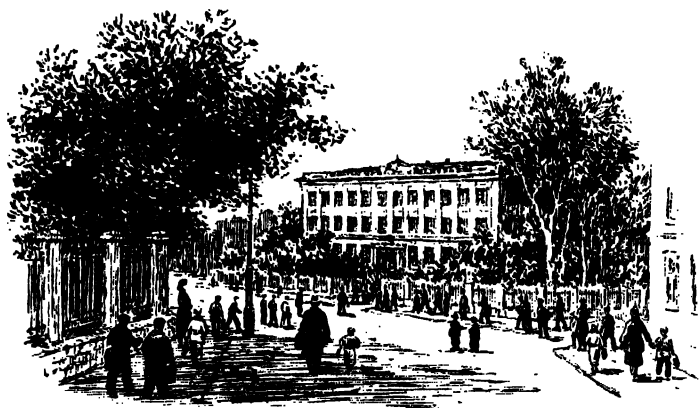
had read the story. One of these was a sailor named Anatoli Negora. A lively correspondence had sprung up between the sailor and the young school-teacher's class, and at the end of May, just before the examinations, he had come to Moscow and paid a visit to the children.

I have made use of this friendship between the sailor and the schoolboys in the present book. The sailor's name has been changed, but the letters are genuine. As for the children I describe, they include both my own pupils and other children I have known. Marina Nikolayevna is neither a self-portrait nor a portrait of anyone I have known; she is a composite character in whom I have sought to depict the traits of many young Soviet teachers whose work I have had occasion to observe. In a word, my purpose has been to tell you about the first steps of a young Soviet school-teacher, her successes and mistakes, her quests and reflections, her joys and disappointments; how she teaches the children and herself learns in the process, and how great is a gratification she derives from her calling.

F. VIGDOROVA

Part One





SEPTEMBER FIRST

Down the middle of the quiet street marched a boy of seven. He wore long trousers and a jacket with shiny gilt buttons. In his hand he carried a satchel and the expression on his face defied description. He clearly felt himself to be the cynosure of all eyes. He tried his best to hide the excitement that bubbled within him, but the knowledge that he was on his way to school for the first time filled him with delight.

I too was on my way to school, and also for the first time. In my hand I carried a list of my pupils. Now and then I glanced over it and re-read the names I already knew by heart: Volodya Antonov, Vanya Vyruchka. . . . For some reason I imagined Vanya to be tall and slender. Sasha Gai. Vitya Ilyinsky, whose surname was the same as my own. What were they all like, I wondered.

As I approached the school I saw more and more children hurrying in the same direction, and my heart beat faster. To tell the truth, I was scared. I was afraid that the moment I walked into the class-room I should forget everything I had prepared to say. "Good morning, children," I whispered. "I am your new teacher. My name is..."

But here was the school. A large brick building. The yard was crowded and noisy. Every detail of the scene imprinted itself vividly on my mind. I saw small knots of youngsters chattering loudly. Little boys, looking as excited and neatly turned out as the one I had seen in the street, clung to their mothers' hands. A tall man in a major's uniform, his head slightly bent, was talking with a middle-aged woman—a teacher evidently. His hand rested tenderly on his son's shoulder and he pressed the boy slightly to him. On the child's face I could see curiosity struggling with timidity. Near the steps leading into the building a small boy was crying bitterly.

"I don't want to go to the first form," he sobbed, "I want to go to the second with Vova!"

Vova stood beside him looking a trifle confused.

"We live in the same flat," he explained. "I brought him to school. But you see," he added, overcoming his embarrassment, "he's little, he doesn't understand yet."

Gay greetings and exclamations of surprise could be heard on all sides.

"You *have* grown! I can hardly recognize you!"

"Why didn't you write?"

"Half our class is new, this year. Seen the list? Eight of them!"

As I absorbed all these impressions I felt my heart beat faster than usual.

Ludmilla Filippovna, the head mistress, came out. When I had spoken with her in her private office two days before, she had seemed to me a small, frail old lady, rather round-shouldered. She reminded me of Tatyana Ivanovna, my neighbour. But now that description did not fit her at all. With quick firm step and shoulders almost straight, she crossed the yard and lightly mounted the platform. The hubbub subsided as in a voice, surprisingly young and clear, the head mistress congratulated the pupils and teachers on the beginning of the school term.

"This is the first post-war term," she said. "You and I will always remember it. We shall always remember this bright September morning on which we have gathered at the doors of our school to begin our studies under a free, untroubled sky. And today, on this great, festive occasion, I should like to remind you of those to whom we owe our freedom and happiness, those who fought bravely and selflessly on the fronts of the Patriotic War—among them our former pupils Grisha Danilov, Pavlik Medvedev and Nina Polyanskaya who were killed in action."

We listened to her in deep silence. She wished us success and trusted that we would do our job well. Then she raised her hand and something glistened: it was the bell. Its merry peal rang out over the school-yard and, at the sound, the doors of the school were flung wide open to receive us.

FORTY-FIVE MINUTES

"It is time to go to your class," said Anatoli Dmitrievich, the head of curricula. "I'll come and introduce you to the children."

"Do you mind if I go alone?"

He gave me a searching glance and after a moment's hesitation replied: "Well, it isn't quite regular. But all right, run along, and for goodness' sake don't be so nervous."

And so I opened the door and entered the class-room. I saw the open window, the bright blue sky beyond and the red roof of the house opposite, but I had only a blurred impression of the room and the faces of my pupils. A few of the children rose, the others remained seated. I stood silently beside my desk and waited. Gradually the rest stood up with a loud clatter.

"Good morning! Sit down!" I said in a loud voice I hardly recognized as my own. My throat was dry and there was a buzzing in my ears. In the same loud voice, as if I were addressing a crowd on a public square, I continued: "My name is Marina Nikolayevna. I am your class mistress..." ("I wrote down everything I was going to say, and now I don't remember anything... What can have happened to me?" I thought in a panic.) "I am going to teach you geography. You will learn all about our native land, its forests and rivers, valleys and mountains. At our natural history lessons we shall..."

Two boys at the back of the class began whispering to each other. Another two on my left did not even trouble to lower their voices. The fact that their conversation was quite audible did not appear to disturb them in the least.

"Quiet please," I said.

They paused long enough to stare at me in something like surprise, and resumed their chatter. One of them was a dark-eyed lad with a live intelligent face. The other was light-haired and scraggy; the collar of his light-blue

shirt hung loosely round his long thin neck, and his eyes had a fixed, slightly mocking gleam.

I picked up a fourth-form reader and began to read in a low voice:

"Once upon a time there was a frog. He lived in a swamp and caught and ate mosquitoes and midges, and in the spring-time he croaked loudly together with his friends. And so he would have gone on living quietly for the rest of his life unless of course he would have been gobbled up by a stork. But here is what happened. . . ."

The noise in the class-room continued. Without raising my voice I went on reading. The boys in the front rows were listening.

"... I have it! I've got a wonderful idea!" cried the frog. "Two of you hold the twig in your mouths and I'll hang on to the middle. . . ."

"Can't you be quiet back there? We want to hear the story!" someone in the front grumbled.

I read on, pretending to notice nothing. Gradually silence reigned, broken only by gusts of laughter at the most amusing passages. Now the frog flew over the meadows and woods, to the delight of all the animals, but the temptation to boast was too much for him and at last he croaked with all his might: "It was my idea! I thought of it all by myself!" I read to the end of the story amid complete silence. The faces before me were alight with smiles. When the bell rang the children crowded round my table and began to ply me with questions:

"Why hasn't my reader got that story in it?"

"Are we going to have English?"

"Will we get copy-books? I only have two but they're both for arithmetic."

I tried to answer them all. My voice sounded quite natural again and I had already forgotten the terrors I had experienced only forty-five minutes before. Who had I been afraid of? The children? Now, after we had laughed together over the puffed-up frog, we felt like old friends.

...I made plenty of blunders during that first lesson of mine. I forgot to call the roll, I did not make an introductory speech, and I had read a story—something I had not intended doing at all. To tell the truth, that frog served me in good stead, it gave me the time I needed to recover my composure. The lesson had been entirely different from the one I had planned. But those first forty-five minutes taught me a simple and extremely important rule, and one which strangely enough I had not known until then: if you want to make yourself heard, do not shout.

Many were the simple truths I mastered in those early days, now so distant but as vividly remembered as if it had all been yesterday.

HOW SHALL I BEGIN?

It was evening. I was sitting at home at my desk. Before me lay a heap of copy-books with the class's first dictation. Galya sat beside me. She too had a copy-book in front of her and a black pencil in her hand. Sniffing slightly from exertion, her head cocked now to one side now to the other, she was busily drawing pot-hooks. Her fair hair kept falling over her forehead. An unruly lock of hair, a part of her cheek and her upturned nose were all I can see of her from where I sat.

Galya was the little girl who lived next door. I had known her for seven years, from the day she was born,

in fact. Her respect for me was tremendous. This was her first year at school and she had the deepest veneration for everything associated with school. She and I had always been good friends, but now I was a teacher, and that made a great difference! And although ever since babyhood she had called me Marina, she now addressed me by name and patronymic. From time to time she lifted her round hazel eyes to me and sighed. I had asked her not to disturb me, and so she was doing her best to be quiet, but I could see that it was not easy for her.

But soon I forgot Galya and was completely immersed in my copy-books. My red pencil was kept busy, underlining one word after another (the children would correct their mistakes themselves).

Here was a nice and neat copy-book, and in good, even handwriting. Whose was it? Tolya Goryunov. . . . A frail, slenderly built lad. The boys called him Tonya, which is a girl's name, and he really did look rather like a girl—he got confused and blushed at the slightest provocation. There was not a single mistake in his work. The next copy-book was a striking contrast—the letters wriggled and writhed in all directions, there was no margin and the bottom of the page was marred by a large blot. Kira Glazkov. Which one was that? I could not remember. Kira made some curious spelling mistakes.

The next copy-book appalled me. It was smudged and dirty, the writing was illegible and there was a mistake in nearly every word. There were several more copy-books of the same kind. . . . I laid them aside.

"Are they very bad?" Galya said in a voice full of sympathy.

"Very," I replied sadly, wondering what I was going to do about it. I did not even know where to begin.

"Galya, it's time for supper and bed!" came a voice from the passage outside and Tatyana Ivanovna, Galya's granny, looked in at the doorway.

"Shh!" Galya admonished her sternly. "Marina Nikolayevna is correcting exercise books."

The grandmother hastily covered her mouth with her hand: she too felt that I was doing something tremendously important and must not be disturbed. Noticing my worried look, she too inquired sympathetically, "What is it? Do they write badly?"

"Just look at this," I answered, "a little dictation, only one page, and so many mistakes. . . ."

"Hm," said Tatyana Ivanovna thoughtfully. "The war has a lot to do with it, if you ask me. The children were evacuated from Moscow and some of them changed schools a good many times. It's hard for them, they have to help their mother round the house, run errands and look after their little brothers and sisters. And then they've just had their summer holidays, and they've forgotten everything. But never mind, it'll come back to them gradually."

Galya and her granny left me and I resumed my work.

IN THE COMMON-ROOM

Anatoli Dmitrievich came to one of my first lessons. It was Russian, and in order to liven up the lesson and to show the boys how important it was to know grammar, I gave them a trick exercise which required both imagination and a rudimentary knowledge of grammar. Throughout the lesson I was conscious of Anatoli Dmitrievich sitting in the far corner of the room. And although his

face was expressionless, I felt that he did not quite approve.

Later I met him in the common-room.

"I should like to have a talk with you, Marina Nikolayevna," he said.

I sat down opposite him and folded my hands in my lap, feeling rather like a schoolgirl who has misbehaved. I looked at Anatoli Dmitrievich's stolid, rather stern features, at the bushy brows overhanging his eyes, and began to feel quite nervous. But he opened his note-book and, to my surprise, said:

"That was a very lively lesson. You succeeded in arousing their interest. That was your main purpose, was it not?"

"Yes, of course."

"Excellent. I am very glad to see that you do not have a mechanical approach to grammar, that you realize how important it is to probe the secrets, so to speak, of ordinary words. It is a fascinating occupation, I grant you. But I want to caution you about one thing. Did you notice how many of your boys actually took part in today's lesson?"

"A good many, it seemed to me. Don't you remember...."

I noticed a faint smile hovering at the corner of Anatoli Dmitrievich's lips and I stopped.

"I'm afraid your trick exercise, however amusing it may have been, was a little over the heads of most of your pupils. In fact nearly all the answers were supplied by that little dark-eyed chap, what's his name?"

"Goryunov?"

"Yes. And Gai too. I know that one, his brother is in the eighth form. But for the others it was a little too

difficult. You must make your lessons as simple and clear as possible at the beginning. And the less 'tricks' the better. One youngster sitting near me had a hard time following the gist of your questions. But I am sure you thought you had made it quite clear to them all. You see, you cannot avoid the 'chores' in teaching. If you try to make your lessons too lively and entertaining, your boys will begin to expect to be amused each time and you will have a hard time getting them to give their minds to ordinary routine study."

"But lessons need not be dull surely?"

"Of course not. We must teach the children to find something interesting in ordinary, everyday studies. Tell me," he asked suddenly, "what sort of mistakes do your pupils make?"

"Mistakes? Oh, all sorts. . . ."

"What grammar rules do they most frequently violate?"

I could not answer. I did not know. All I could remember was that there were ten "twos" for dictation, but for the life of me, I could not say what particular mistakes each boy made.

"Yet that is very important, you know," said Anatoli Dmitrievich.

STUMBLING-BLOCKS

Yes, it was very important indeed, as I discovered for myself at the very next dictation. Vanya Vyruchka made a spelling mistake which showed that he had not stopped to think of the derivation of the word. He had spelt the word as he pronounced it, and of course it was incorrect. I saw that it was one thing to understand a grammar rule

and another thing to be able to apply it. This showed me the need for repetition to inculcate good habits from the very beginning.

Following Anatoli Dmitrievich's advice, I began to make study of each of my pupil's mistakes. I soon found that Vyruchka had trouble with his unaccented vowels, that Labutin's weakness was his case endings, and that most of Glazkov's spelling mistakes were due exclusively to carelessness. And this knowledge gave me much greater confidence in myself.

Yes, I learned a great deal in those first few weeks. I had quite some trouble at first trying to fit the lesson into the regulation forty-five minutes. I did my best, when preparing for the lesson, to account for every minute of the time, but somehow I always seemed to miscalculate. Either I would rush through the lesson so quickly that I would find I still had twenty minutes left before the bell rang, or else the time would be up before I was half-way through.

We covered the entire Russian programme for the first quarter in one month. I believed that I had been quite thorough about it and that the children had grasped all I had taught them. But later I found once again what a long and difficult road it is from understanding to proficiency. My red pencil was kept busy marking mistakes in the exercise books, mistakes that occurred again and again.

One day I told the class a story I had read in my childhood (I have forgotten where), showing how harmful it is to try to memorize things mechanically. A school-boy had been given the task of learning by heart Krylov's fable "The Wolf and the Lamb". Sticking his fingers in his ears, he bent over the book and in a flat, toneless voice

repeated over and over again: "One hot summer's day, a lamb went down to the river to drink. . . One hot summer's day, a lamb. . . One hot summer's day," and so on. But try as he might the words would not stick in his head.

After a while, another boy who had been listening to this dreary recital said: "I know the verse by heart already," and then and there he recited the whole fable without once faltering. When his astonished friend asked him how he had memorized it so quickly, he replied: "The trouble with you is that you just repeat the words without understanding their meaning. When I read I try to picture the whole scene. It is a hot summer's day—I imagine the sun shining bright, I see the green grass and hear the stream gurgling. There is a dark forest near the stream and out of the forest comes a lean, hungry wolf with wicked-looking teeth. He catches sight of the lamb by the river and goes bounding over to it. I see the poor little white lamb, its eyes bulging with fright. I can picture it all so clearly that it is easy for me to remember the story."

As he listened to his friend's description, the first boy also visualized the scene and at once the words of the fable which had been empty, meaningless sounds became full of meaning and he quickly memorized the verse.

"It's easy enough to picture a wolf and a lamb," said Seryozha when I had finished the story. "But how are you going to picture 'wondrous beasts'? Whoever saw a 'wondrous beast'?" Seryozha was referring to the fragment from the prologue to Pushkin's poem "Ruslan and Ludmilla" which we had been learning.

"Suppose you try to imagine what they are like," I suggested.

After a brief pause, Sasha Gai raised his hand.

"Wondrous beasts are the animals you read about in fairy-tales. Like the Wise Cat and the Hunchback Horse or some queer, two-headed animal, say. And then there's the Glowing Bird as well."

"A Glowing Bird not an animal," someone objected.

"No, but it's a fairy-tale bird just the same, something magic and wonderful."

Sasha had started the ball rolling. Now every boy had some little detail of his own to add to the description of the magic, enchanted animals. After that my boys had no difficulty in reciting that Pushkin verse from memory.

A GAME OF CHESS

One day after lessons I noticed that several boys had stayed behind in the class-room and were gathered around Tolya Goryunov's desk. I saw Tolya produce a chess-board from his desk and begin to set out the chess-men.

"Which of you plays chess?" I asked, approaching the group.

"I do," replied Tolya. "So does Sasha," he jerked his head toward Gai, "and Glazkov as well."

"May I have a try?" I asked.

The boys exchanged glances and Tolya, reddening as usual, said: "Why, of course, Marina Nikolayevna. Whom would you like to play with?"

"With you, if you like."

We moved the board over to my desk, took seats opposite each other and, with the others pressed closely round us, went into battle. Tolya proved to be a serious opponent, quick-witted, calculating and cautious. I played only

slightly better than he did and discovered to my surprise that I was feeling rather nervous. In the first place it seemed to me that all the sympathy was on Tolya's side. I felt that all the boys wanted him to win, and the attitude of the spectators is extremely important in such cases. Moreover I realized suddenly that a great deal depended on the outcome of this chess-match and I felt that I simply had to win.

My opponent studied the board intently, his brows knitted and lips tightly compressed. At his side stood his friend Sasha Gai whose face mirrored everything that took place on the field of battle. He took every move Tolya made so closely to heart that one might have thought he and not his friend was playing.

I was too occupied to observe what was going on around me but it was impossible not to notice Borya Levin's behaviour. His sympathies were all for the side that was being worsted. He was less pleased by a good move than annoyed by what he considered to be a false one. Tolya or I had only to touch a piece for Borya to give vent to a loud exclamation of disgust; or he would turn away demonstratively, unable to bear the sight of real or imagined blunders.

"You're disturbing us," Tolya said at last with fine reserve. "If you can't keep your comments to yourself you'd better go away."

Borya quieted down.

After a while I manoeuvred with my knight and took Tolya's bishop. The white position grew serious. I glanced at Tolya's earnest face, at the furrow between his brows and, though I too was carried away by the excitement of the game, I thought: "Why am I trying so hard to win? After all, he is only a child. I let Galya beat me

at draughts sometimes, don't I? I shan't mind losing the game half as much as he will."

It was my move—one which would obviously decide the issue. I was now in a position to make Tolya give up his rook, and then... But instead of doing the obvious



thing I began to study the opposite corner of the board as if contemplating some entirely new combination, and played with a pawn, thus giving Tolya an unexpected advantage. He looked up at me in such genuine amazement that I felt quite awkward. The boys, who had been looking on in tense silence, stirred and I overheard someone say with something like disappointment: "She's weakening."

"You've made a mistake, Marina Nikolayevna," Tolya said. "Take it back."

"I'm sorry, I shall try to be more careful next time," I replied, blushing in spite of myself.

But Tolya did not take advantage of my magnanimity. He did not want victory handed to him by his opponent. He made some neutral move after which I moved as I had originally intended. White made a few more attempts at defence, but it was no use. After one or two moves the white position was clearly hopeless.

"Checkmate!" the boys chorused.

Tolya lifted his dark eyes to mine and his features suddenly spread out in a broad grin. A loud sigh escaped the onlookers and the usual hubbub of talk burst forth: "Now if Goryunov had had the sense to..." "If Marina Nikolayevna had moved with that pawn..."

I glanced at my watch. The game had lasted forty minutes. If I had talked with Tolya for forty minutes could I have learned more about him? I think not.

"I HIT HIM BACK FIRST..."

One day during break Elena Mikhailovna brought two boys to me. One of them was my pupil Borya Levin; the other I did not know. Both were red and dishevelled. Borya looked like a fighting-cock, he was bristling all over and even his closely cropped fair hair seemed to be standing on end.

"This Levin of yours is behaving abominably," the indignant teacher declared. "He beat up Zhenya Volkov for no reason at all, I saw myself the way he pounced on him."

"What happened?" I asked Levin.

"First I hit him back..." was the puzzling reply.

"How can you hit back first?" Elena Mikhailovna demanded, barely suppressing a smile. "Fights don't begin that way."

We never did discover how that particular fight began. Each boy insisted that he was in the right, but neither could explain clearly what had happened.

Levin was a quarrelsome youngster. He would flare up at the slightest provocation. Some disagreeable character in a book, a sudden downpour that prevented him from playing ball outside after school, or a boot-lace breaking at the wrong time would be enough to set him off. Whenever I entered the class-room it was his voice I heard raised above the others: "What the devil! I'll punch your head!"

During lessons, however, Borya behaved quite well. In fact he took the keenest interest in his studies. In his bright face with its generous sprinkling of golden freckles I could always read the reflection of my own ideas. He never allowed his attention to wander and he literally hung on my every word, displaying a passionate interest in every subject.

We were just beginning to study the geography of the U.S.S.R. Ten days after our first lesson, Levin brought me a copy-book containing a detailed description of all the zones, although I had only dealt with the Polar zone and the tundra. He had read through the whole text-book from cover to cover and had not only rewritten all the characteristics of each zone, but had described an imaginary journey through the whole country, using different means of transport for each locality.

"Now I am racing along in a reindeer sled," he wrote. "All around me as far as I can see stretch the snow-covered plains. We are in the tundra. A piercing wind whistles in my ears and I can hardly catch my breath. But what is this? Coloured searchlights seem to be moving over the sky." He went on to give a description of the aurora

borealis that would no doubt have surprised the inhabitants of the Arctic. He made it look exactly like a holiday fire-work display on the Red Square.

"I change over to an aeroplane, and now I am in the taiga," I read on. "Over my shoulder I carry a hunting-rifle." In the next chapter he announced: "I don't need my warm fur clothing now. I am riding on the back of a camel." In the course of his imaginary tour he visited the Donbas and the Volga area, Artek and Sakhalin. Indeed I scarcely managed to follow all the swift changes of landscape, people, climate, flora and fauna. And it was described with the enthusiasm of one who had seen it all with his own eyes.

"What will you do in the geography class now that you've gone through the whole book?" I asked him.

"Oh, geography's always interesting for me," he replied.

That was the truth. In the geography class Borya invariably found something to add to whatever I had to say. And he spoke exactly as though he had actually visited the places he described.

"Not far from Kirovsk there is an experimental agricultural station, and just think of it, in a cold place like that, right in the frozen marshes in fact, they grow potatoes and cabbage, yes, and strawberries too!" he excitedly informed the class on one occasion. "Great big strawberries as big as this," he would add, somewhat less confidently, as he showed with his fingers the size of the strawberries grown in the northern climes.

He had a remarkably retentive memory, often surprising me by quoting lengthy excerpts from some book he had read.

"Twenty years ago the Khibiny tundra was a vast stretch of waste-land, mossy marshy plains, woods and rocks. Today, on the bank of a blue lake, the city of Kirovsk has sprung up exactly like in a fairy-tale. There are telephones and a telegraph office, factories, plants, mines, schools. And on the top of the rock there is a ring of green stone—these are apatites. It is they that brought life to these parts. Khibiny is a mineralo. . . (he faltered at this point, but his splendid memory came to his aid and with the same breathless eagerness he mastered the difficult word) a mineralogical paradise! If you only knew what marvellous stones they find there! Red ones called eudialytes—there's a legend about them which says that they are drops of congealed blood. And then there are green stones called aegirite, and violet fluor-spar, and titanite which is just like gold!"

True, we had gone over some of this in class and much could be found in the text-book. But neither I nor the text-book had said anything about a "mineralogical paradise". It never occurred to Borya to mention the source from which he quoted; his young mind absorbed everything he read so that it became part of him.

LYOSHA TO THE RESCUE!

One youngster who intrigued me was Lyosha Ryabinin. He was a sturdy, thick-set lad, who spoke little and kept himself in the background. Nevertheless I noticed that the others obeyed him implicitly. The monitor would be at his wit's end trying to persuade the boys to clear the class-room during break, but Lyosha had merely to lift an eyebrow and the room would be emptied in a twinkling. His height alone distinguished him from the

others, he was the tallest boy in the class and evidently the strongest.

After a while I discovered rather to my surprise that he and Borya Levin were very much alike in some respects. Once, as I came out of the school building, I heard a commotion in the yard. I reached the excited knot of boys just in time to see the usually calm and unruffled Lyosha seize Trofimov by the collar and shake him with all his might, growling the while through clenched teeth: "You just try and do it again, I'll teach you! You just try!"

When he saw me he stopped shaking Trofimov but did not relinquish his hold.

"What's all this about?" I demanded sternly.

Lyosha made no reply.

"Answer me at once! What are you hitting Trofimov for? What has he done?"

"Let him tell you himself," Lyosha reluctantly answered. I turned to Trofimov. "Very well, you tell me."

But Trofimov too was silent, as were the others.

Yura Labutin spoke up.

"Marina Nikolayevna, Ryabinin isn't to blame. He was taking my part. . . . Trofimov's always making fun of me, calls me squint-eye," he added in a low voice.

Ryabinin released Trofimov, took his cap which Gai had been holding and pulled it down over his eyes. Then he spoke.

"I told him to stop ragging Labutin, Marina Nikolayevna, I gave him fair warning. But he wouldn't listen. He's always teasing him, calling him Squinty, or Four-Eyes. It's got so Labutin's stopped wearing his glasses. But if he does that he'll stay cross-eyed, that's what the doctor said."

"Is that what the trouble was?" I asked Trofimov.

"Ye-es," he answered in a low voice.

"Aren't you ashamed of yourself?"

He said nothing.

"We all told him," Gai piped up. "It isn't Labutin's fault if he's got bad eyes, is it? What's the sense in teasing him about it!"

Trofimov hung his head. "I won't do it any more," he muttered.

PAGE BY PAGE

What can be simpler than mental arithmetic? We had only ten minutes of it at the beginning of the lesson but I liked to observe the boys in those ten minutes. Ryabinin took his time; with his eyes on the blackboard, his lips slightly moving, he would work the sum out in his head. He was always one of the last to raise his hand, but I never remember him making a mistake. Labutin, on the contrary, shot up his hand before I had time to finish explaining the problem. And three times out of five he had the wrong answer. Trofimov secretly tried to work out the answer on paper. Once I went over to him and put my hand on his shoulder without saying a word. He flushed to the roots of his hair and quickly hid the slip of paper. Kira Glazkov was muddle-headed as always. When the rest of the class divided, he multiplied; when the others added, he subtracted. Hence I made a point of looking at him directly when I repeated the problem for the benefit of the class: "Multiply 354 by 15. Did you hear, Kira? Multiply!" He would grin and nod in response.

In the beginning I learned to recognize Kira Glazkov chiefly by his absurd spelling mistakes. He was incredi-

bly absent-minded. I once gave him a simple arithmetical problem to work out on the blackboard. After some concentrated calculation Kira chalked up the answer: $40\frac{1}{2}$ pupils in the class-room! It was only when the whole class burst out laughing that Kira realized something was wrong.

"Whatever do you dream about all the time?" I asked him, barely suppressing a smile at the sight of his bewildered expression.

"He collects stamps!" Sasha Gai put in.

"A dangerous hobby," I reflected, recalling my own school-days and some of my classmates who had collected stamps to the exclusion of everything else.

To Borya mental arithmetic was a source of unending delight. It was as if I were teaching him to perform real miracles. For instance, after I had explained that in order to multiply a two-digit figure by one hundred and one, you merely had to write out the figure twice (thus: $44 \times 101 = 4444$), Borya went about for days during break multiplying by one hundred and one. Now and then he would verify the result on paper and each time he would cry out in a fresh paroxysm of joy: "It came out! It's right!"

Or I might ask the class to think of sentences giving examples of some rule of grammar. Trofimov nearly always repeated the sentences I had given. Sasha Gai, on the other hand, always had something original to offer, and if the exercise called for several sentences he would invent a whole story.

In the beginning I always used to think of Volodya Rumyantsev, a rosy-cheeked, chubby-faced boy with bright brown eyes, as "me-and-Andryusha". Andryusha, or Andrei Morozov, a thin, pale, quiet lad who sat next to

him, was his chum. Whenever anyone had to be elected to some post or another Volodya invariably nominated Morozov. He invariably prefaced whatever he did and whatever he said with the words, "Now, me and Andryusha...."

As for Andryusha, he was a model pupil, neat and industrious. Whenever I called on him to answer questions he would conscientiously repeat the text-book almost word for word. Tolya Goryunov, on the other hand, always answered in his own words, supplementing his reply with what he had heard from me during the lessons or what he had gleaned from other books.

It is impossible to give a portrait of all the boys in the class. But to me everything that happened in the classroom, during and after lessons, was like reading some new book, each page of which yielded something fresh and intriguing. And from day to day I felt that I was growing more observant, learning to pay attention to details which formerly would have escaped my notice.

TEN FILMS

I rarely went to the common-room during break. As a rule I stood by the window in the corridor. The boys would crowd round me and we would chat pleasantly of this and that. Not infrequently after such talks I would go to the library and ask for *Popular Physics* or *The Path-Finders' Handbook*, or some other book which the boys seemed to know by heart but which I had never read. On reading Fersman's *Popular Mineralogy* I discovered, rather to my relief, entire pages which Borya had quoted to us in the geography lessons. Now I knew where his information about aegirite and fluor-spar came from.

Once Labutin asked me why aspen leaves shake. To my great relief the bell rang mercifully at that moment and saved me from disgrace. That same evening I started to read Dmitri Kaigorodov's book, *Tales of the Russian Forest*, and I realized that although I had always loved the woods and had read many stories and verses about them, I actually knew very little about the life of the forest, and I learned much that was new and interesting to me.

Previously it had seemed to me that any person of average intelligence should be able to teach in primary school, and that surely with my higher education I ought to have little difficulty. But I discovered that I was gravely mistaken. If you are content to teach by the text-book alone then, of course, the knowledge you have will suffice. But if you want to be prepared to answer all the "whys" and encourage more "whys" you must read a great deal, keep your mind alert and your eyes open, and even then you will find that you have much more to learn!

Another thing I noticed was that the more I learned myself the more the boys wanted to know. One day I told them about the Soviet North, and the next day several boys brought in views of northern landscapes, a book about the Chelyuskin and Papanin North Pole expeditions. Seryozha Selivanov made a yurta out of brown clay, Tolya Goryunov wrote a verse.

One day when we were reading Chekhov's story "Vanka," an amusing thing happened. I had brought a small film-projector to class and showed them a film illustrating the story. Chekhov's moving narrative came to life for my boys. There was little Vanka Zhukov kneeling in front of a bench laboriously writing a letter to his

grandad in the village, begging him to come and take him home; there was grandad himself, old Konstantin Makarovich, the night-watchman, in his huge sheepskin coat, making the rounds of the village with his clappers. We saw Vanka's cruel mistress slapping his face with a herring, and a picture of a forest of young firs tipped with hoar-frost and Vanka and his grandad about to cut down a Christmas-tree.

Suddenly the film caught fire. Evidently the lamp had been too close to the lens. I quickly disconnected the wire and extinguished the flames, but the film was gone. The boys were heart-broken. They had wanted so much to see the rest of the pictures. After class we discussed the situation.

"I'm afraid I haven't got another film like that," I explained.

That seemed to settle the matter for there was no more discussion. Imagine my surprise, then, on coming into the class-room the following day to find myself the possessor of no less than ten films of Vanka Zhukov! It appeared that almost the whole class had set out first thing in the morning in search of the film, and ten youngsters had been fortunate enough to find it. Each of them came rushing into the room with the triumphant announcement: "Marina Nikolayevna, I've brought..."

"We know ... the film!" cried the rest.

The incident was most gratifying to me; it showed that relations of friendship and mutual understanding were gradually developing between my pupils and myself.

Yet, in spite of this encouraging sign of progress, I was troubled. The Vorobeiko brothers and Kolya Savenkov were the chief cause of my anxiety.

WHAT IS TO BE DONE?

I shall begin with Kolya.

For some reason I had taken a dislike to him from the very first. He had a pair of small, deep-set eyes and large ears that stuck out. He had a habit of puckering his forehead which was deeply lined as a result. His expression was sullen and unpleasant.

At first Kolya Savenkov sat listlessly at the back of the class and appeared to take no notice of me whatever. And yet there was something about his manner that put me on my guard.

"How can you come to school with such filthy nails," I told him once.

"I don't care!" he retorted insolently.

"Is that the way to speak to your teacher?"

"I didn't say anything, did I?" he replied and turned away with a show of indifference.

"I'm not going to correct your home-work any more," I told him on another occasion. "Your copy-books are a disgrace. It's unpleasant to handle them!"

"Don't handle them then."

It was not so much his insolence as his complete indifference that was so annoying. His manner seemed to say: "It's all the same to me whether you're there or not. Leave me alone."

At first Savenkov did not interfere with the lessons. He merely stared out of the window or occupied himself by whittling bits of sticks with his penknife. When, however, he flew a paper bird in the middle of the lesson I lost my temper and rebuked him severely.

He listened calmly, fixing me with a cold stare. He

seemed vastly pleased with himself for having succeeded in making me angry and interrupting the lesson.

The following day during the lesson he got up and walked slowly down the space between the desks. I told him to sit down. Lazily he turned round, threw a contemptuous glance at me over his shoulder, and sauntered back to his seat.

After that not a day passed without some fresh display of irritating behaviour on Savenkov's part. I felt that his sole purpose was to annoy and humiliate me. During break he would dash wildly up and down the corridor or leap over desks in the class-room, resisting all the monitor's efforts to evict him. At lessons he either dozed or flew paper birds according to his mood. Throughout the month of September he did no home-work whatsoever, and not once did he give a satisfactory answer in class. In most cases when I called on him he would announce in a surly, insolent tone that he was not prepared to answer because he had not done his lessons. On more than one occasion, when I happened to praise one or another of the boys for an excellent answer or a good recitation, I caught Savenkov looking at me with bitter hostility.

In all justice to the class it must be said that the others did their best to help me with Savenkov.

"What are you racing about like mad for?" Ryabinin would demand.

"None of your business!"

"Stop interfering with the lesson," Goryunov would appeal.

"Teacher's pet!" Savenkov would sneer.

"If you don't shut up you'll be sorry!" Levin would burst out angrily.

"We'll see who'll be sorry..."

And as a rule the retort would be accompanied by a slap.

What was I to do?

I remembered being told more than once by lecturers on pedagogics that in such cases it was advisable to give the trouble-maker some responsible task. Accordingly, I suggested to the boys that Kolya Savenkov ought to be elected class monitor.

I must confess that the class was rather surprised at this suggestion. But they did not argue the point. Kolya was duly elected, but it did not take long to see that the experiment had failed.

"Have you drawn up a list of the day's monitors?" I asked him.

"Let Gai do it, he's the orderly one," replied Kolya in his usual surly manner.

"Take the boys down to the cloak-room," I would ask him.

"They're not babies, they can go themselves."

Standing by the window with the boys during break I noticed on several occasions that, though he held aloof from our group, Savenkov listened to our conversation and looked as if he would like to come over and join us. But on catching my eye he would at once assume his customary look of unconcern and proceed to treat us to one of his usual "performances": to whistle, or barge into the group with wild whoops, or begin battering at the door of the class-room, although he knew very well no one was admitted during break.

He continued stubbornly to refuse to obey me or anyone else. He did not carry out a single task I gave him or take the trouble to prepare his lessons.

"I'm afraid you will have to be expelled," I said.

"See if I care," was the reply.

"Savenkov, leave the class-room at once!" I would order him when goaded to despair by his abominable behaviour.

"All right, I'll go," he would mutter and picking up his satchel would take himself off.

I was literally at my wit's end. I did not know what to do and I thought ruefully of the articles on pedagogy I had read which described similar instances roughly as follows: Kolya was a naughty, disobedient child. The teacher entrusted him with the task of organizing a dramatics circle (for example), and after that the boy began to make excellent progress at his studies and became a help to the teacher instead of a hindrance.

I recalled my own school-days, my own teacher who had been with us from the first form to the seventh. We came to her first at the age of eight and took leave of her at the age of fifteen. We idolized her, to us she was the most wonderful person in the world, the cleverest, the kindest and the most just. We obeyed her implicitly—indeed ours was more than ordinary obedience. Whatever she said and whatever she did was right, and in our behaviour we were guided solely by what we knew Anna Ivanovna expected of us.

And now I tried to understand what Anna Ivanovna had done to win our confidence so completely. Was it some elusive charm she alone possessed? Would I ever be able to master the secret?

Grappling with the problem of what to do with Kolya Savenkov I remembered an episode from my student-days that had made a strong impression on my mind. It happened during the war. I was working as pupil teacher

in a fourth-form class. One of the boys went about shouting "Heil" and imitating one of the characters in the film *The Brave Soldier Švejk*. The word was hateful to the others and they begged him to stop, but he would not listen. The teacher, chancing to overhear the argument, addressed the class as follows:

"All those who have a father, mother, sister or brother at the front, stand up!"

Some 14 or 15 children rose.

"All those who have a war invalid at home, stand up."

Several more got up.

"Are there any of you whose father has been killed in action?"

Amid deadly silence three boys rose to their feet.

"Now you see whom you have hurt by your thoughtless behaviour," the teacher said sternly, looking straight at the offender. "What right have you to give them pain? You must apologize!"

The boy hung his head in shame.

Recalling the incident I thought to myself: "I have been harsh and severe to Savenkov all this time and what have I achieved? He is getting worse from day to day. No, I have gone about it the wrong way."

I was so discouraged by the whole affair that I sometimes shrank from going to school.

I realized that I ought to take the problem to Anatoli Dmitrievich, but my pride held me back. After all, I had hardly started teaching. Must I run for help so soon? I actually tried to avoid him and if we did happen to meet sometimes in the corridor I hurried past. Occasionally he sat in at a lesson and praised me for keeping the class so quiet and interested.

His advice was always simply and tactfully offered. "Would it not be better to put your questions to the whole class so that all the children should think of the answer? Then you can call on one of them to answer. You say: 'Sasha, what nouns belong to the first declension?' with the result that Sasha alone thinks of the answer while the others assume that the first declension is something that does not concern them."

Incidentally, whenever Anatoli Dmitrievich came into the class-room Savenkov behaved himself, a fact which made me deeply indignant. "The little coward," I thought, "he's afraid of the head of curricula but he thinks he can do what he likes with me and get away with it."

THE MOST IMPORTANT THING

"Why don't you drop into Natalya Andreyevna's class sometime?" Anatoli Dmitrievich suggested to me once. "She is a fine person and an excellent teacher. She has a great deal of experience. After all, she has taught in school for forty years! I would advise you to pay her class a visit when you have time. I think you would find it interesting."

But I did not go. I really cannot understand now why I did not, unless it was that curious stubborn streak in me and my determination to solve my own problems.

As it happened, Natalya Andreyevna came over to me in the common-room one day and asked me pleasantly whether I would mind if she came to my class.

"Not at all," I replied.

She came several times. She sat quietly at the back of the class, taking in all that went on. As a rule I did

not like having outsiders at my lessons. For one thing, the children did not behave the same as they did when we were alone; the difference was barely perceptible but it was there nevertheless. Evidently they felt the strain of a stranger's presence as much as I did. But with Natalya Andreyevna this was not the case. There was something so calm and gentle about her, she laughed so heartily when I or the boys cracked a joke, and listened so attentively to their answers, nodding her approval when the answers were well-phrased, that her presence was not disturbing in the least. "I like the way you call the boys by their first names," she said to me. "Have you noticed how quiet that boy over there is? Do you think he is brooding over something?"

She asked me to tell her more about my boys. I told her about Goryunov, about Levin and Gai. And I told her about Savenkov. She listened very attentively, now knitting her brows, now tapping her fingers lightly against the edge of the desk, and I saw that she was deeply moved by my account of the problem that was causing me such worry and annoyance.

"Come to my class when you have time," she said, "and I'll tell you about my pupils."

I went. I found there that atmosphere of eager alertness that springs from complete harmony between teacher and pupils. It was a genuine pleasure to attend her lessons, to hear how she spoke to her pupils and how willingly and intelligently they answered her questions. As I sat there I had a vague sense of having experienced all this before, but it was not until much later that I realized why: it brought back the memory of my own school-days. Anna Ivanovna's lessons had been like that—thrilling and engrossing.

Even more interesting than the lessons were Natalya Andreyevna's stories about her pupils. Listening to her, I could not help thinking that only a wise and observant mother could know so much about her children. And I noticed that it was of her difficult pupils that Natalya Andreyevna spoke with particular warmth.

One of her boys had lived for two years in enemy-occupied territory. One day a fascist had ordered the boy to bring him an axe. The child believed he was about to be murdered, and from sheer terror he lost the power of speech. His legs too were paralyzed, and for a time he could not walk. The incident left him with a permanent stutter. He was already nine when he enrolled in the first form. He would sit silent and apathetic during lessons or stare out of the window with his eyes full of tears, waiting for his mother to come and take him home. He was obviously ashamed of being so much older than the others and nearly a head taller besides.

Natalya Andreyevna made a point of speaking about his height as something to be proud of. "Vitya is the tallest boy in the class, he will help us hang up the picture," she would say. Or: "Vitya, you're taller than the others, help me get those books from the top shelf." Knowing that the boy would be thrown into the most painful confusion if called upon unexpectedly to answer a question, she would endeavour to warn him with a glance or a casual phrase: "We'll write down this sentence and then Vitya will tell us..." This gave Vitya time to compose himself.

She never missed an opportunity to praise the lad, even if it were merely a matter of a word written more neatly today than yesterday. Step by step she built up the lad's self-confidence.

Now Vitya was in the fourth form. He had gradually caught up with the rest of the class and made friends with the teacher, although he still held himself aloof from his classmates.

"You see," Natalya Andreyevna said to me, "it was his pride that prevented him from making progress. It hurt him to see that the others were better at lessons than he, that they felt so much more at home in their surroundings. It was necessary to raise his prestige in the eyes of the class. And before long an opportunity presented itself. Vitya did a very good drawing of a winter forest and a frightened hare racing through the trees. At my suggestion, he copied the picture on a large sheet of paper and I pinned it up on the blackboard. Then I told the class to think up a story based on the drawing: what had happened before the hare had taken fright and scampered off into the forest, and what became of him afterwards. Once or twice I said: 'This is a very good drawing Vitya has done, very expressive. Look at the terror in the hare's eyes, see how his ears are pressed back! We haven't had such a nice picture to work with for a long time.' And what was the result? The boys began to regard Vitya with respect, and nothing gives a person more self-confidence than the knowledge that others believe in him. Is that not true?"

"But," Natalya Andreyevna went on, "if with Vitya I had to encourage the slightest tendency to lift up his head and look about him, with Valya it was quite the reverse. This boy came to school firmly convinced that he was the smartest and most capable boy in the class, and that everything he did must be right. Of course he was an only child. I have seventeen of them in my class! Here, you see, the root of the evil lies not so much in

Valya himself as in Valya's mamma, for it is she who is convinced that her son must be superior to all other children. Do you know what I do in such cases? I invite the parents to come to school. It does them good to sit in at lessons and see for themselves that their child is no better and no worse than others; that some children read much better than theirs and can do sums much faster in their heads."

"How do you manage with Valya?"

"I don't scold him or nag him about being conceited and boastful. But neither do I permit him to lord it over his classmates. Say he drops or spills something on the floor: being a spoilt child he will expect someone else to clear it up, but I see to it that he does it himself. Or he may solve some problem sooner than the others and look about him with a triumphant smirk on his face. I will say to him: 'It's good that you solved your problem, but why have you left no margin? And why must you have so many blots? Look how crumpled and dirty your copy-book is. . . .' I actually find him harder to manage than Vitya. Such an uneven temperament, and so arrogant! But it is very important to correct it in time, before all those sharp corners and angles harden and take final shape, otherwise he will grow up to be undependable both as a comrade and a worker. Yes, it is not simple."

"No, indeed it is not," I echoed with a sigh.

"And don't imagine for a moment that it is much easier with the bright pupils, those who get the best marks. Take Volodya and Mitya, for example. They both get 'fives' for everything. Their report cards are identical. Yet in character they are utterly different. If Volodya's neighbour upsets the ink-well over the desk Volodya will make him wipe up the mess but will not say a word to

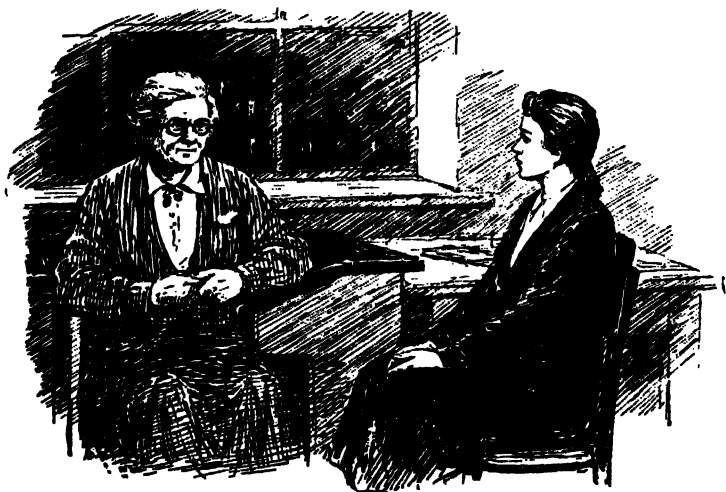
me. But Mitya is forever sticking up his hand with some complaint: 'Natalya Andreyevna, Kostya's smeared his copy-book! . . . Natalya Andreyevna, Kostya asked you for a text-book and he's got one all the time.' 'Are you Kostya?' I tell him quietly. 'Kostya will tell me all about it if he wishes.' "

We were sitting in Natalya Andreyevna's deserted class-room. It had grown quite dark but we did not turn on the lights. The rain beat against the window-panes, and although I drank in everything Natalya Andreyevna told me I felt extremely downcast. All she had said was quite clear to me and yet I could not for the life of me see any solution to the problem that tormented me: what was to be done about Kolya? Now, she was a clever gifted woman, she would always find the correct path. But I evidently lacked her gift, for I could think of no way out of my difficulty.

"Tell me," I asked softly, "what is the most important thing in our work? I realize that there can be no ready-made recipes, that each case must be handled differently. But is there not some chief, guiding principle that would help even in the most difficult, the most complicated cases?"

"The most important thing?" Natalya Andreyevna echoed my words thoughtfully. "Let me tell you of a case I knew. Some time ago a young school-teacher joined our staff. I visited her class once or twice. On the face of it everything appeared to be all right. She conducted her class strictly according to the rules. 'Are you satisfied with your pupils?' I asked her. 'Quite,' she replied. 'Tell me,' I asked her, 'what sort of a boy is that one sitting in the front row?' 'Oh, he's wonderful. He gets top marks for everything. A bright, intelligent youngster.' 'And

what about that dark-eyed lad in the blue shirt?' 'Well, he's average, he never gets more than "threes". But I must say he's quite well-behaved.' 'And that snub-nosed one with the freckles?' 'He gets "fours", but he's good at arithmetic.'



"And you know," Natalya Andreyevna went on, "all those boys, dark-eyed and blue-eyed, black-haired and light-haired, snub-nosed and freckled, seemed to merge into a single face, and only one thing distinguished one from the other: the marks they got—'fives', 'fours', 'threes', 'twos'. As if you can judge a schoolboy only by his marks! As if there is nothing more to a person—even if he is only eight years old—than the marks he gets! I told her as much and she replied coldly: 'I have forty of them, surely you don't expect me to know every one of them.' I tell you I was horrified by that cool answer. How can you work with children unless you know them? How

can you teach them even spelling or multiplication tables? Forty boys means forty different characters, not two of them alike. Not to know your pupils is to grope in the dark without the slightest hope of success!"

She lapsed into silence for a moment, then went on in a calmer tone:

"You said that your Savenkov is a difficult case. True enough, he does not seem to be a pleasant child—sullen, rude and malicious. Yet perhaps you ought to give him more of your attention. Have you been to his home?"

"No, I haven't."

"Well then, you must go by all means."

"I know I ought to. But you see, Natalya Andreyevna, I have taken a deep dislike to the boy. Apart from everything else he is a coward: in Anatoli Dmitrievich's presence he behaves himself, but the minute Anatoli Dmitrievich leaves the class-room he starts annoying me and the class again."

"Yes, that is very unpleasant," Natalya Andreyevna said slowly. "But I am certain that you will get to understand him too one day. You know, I have been teaching for forty years now and I cannot remember a single case that was completely hopeless. You asked me what is the most important element in our work. I would say that the most important thing for the teacher is to know his pupils. You may have studied a pupil's behaviour in class, or at the exams, formed an idea of his knowledge, given him a testimonial even, and still you may not really know him. And so you wait patiently for that moment, for some unforeseen event that will guide you to the secret core of the human being. At such moments everything becomes as clear as if a searchlight had pointed the way to the truth..."

NEW BOOTS

One day I was given a number of coupons for boots and clothing to be distributed to the pupils. I usually discussed such matters with the children, for they knew better than I who were the most needy and I respected their opinion.

"Savenkov's boots are pretty well worn," Sasha Gai suggested uncertainly.

"Savenkov doesn't deserve to get anything," Yura Labutin objected. "He hasn't asked for anything either. He knows better."

But I decided that Savenkov should have a coupon. I too had noticed his shabby boots.

When he came to school (after missing one whole lesson as usual) I gave him the coupon. He looked at me with such amazement that I was quite taken aback. But he took the coupon and next day he came to school wearing new boots. During break I noticed that he was not in the corridor. I pushed the door slightly ajar and saw him standing by the window with one foot on the radiator, carefully wiping his boot with a pocket-handkerchief. I closed the door softly and walked slowly down the corridor to the common-room.

The rest of the day seemed to drag interminably, but at last it ended and I hurried home. I was overwhelmed by an intense feeling of shame.

That boy had irritated me, he had made my work difficult. I did not like him and he knew it. As a matter of fact, now that I came to think of it, his behaviour had been growing worse every day. Was this not his answer to my hostile attitude? And why had I taken such a dislike to him from the first day? What did I know about

him other than that he was gloomy, surly and that his copy-books were anything but neat and his hands were dirty? After all, Savenkov was only eleven years old. How could I have allowed this absurd mutual enmity to spring up between us? Why did I never have a pleasant word for him? How could I have allowed this to happen?

The next day I went to Savenkov's home. He saw me as I was crossing the yard but he did not come over to greet me, he only threw a dark, suspicious look in my direction.

"Kolya, there's your teacher going to your mother to complain about you," I heard someone say behind my back.

Kolya emitted a shrill whistle and tore off down the street.

I rang the bell. It was answered by a woman of about thirty-five with a tired expression.

"Whom do you want?"

"I would like to see the Savenkovs. I'm from school."

"From school?" she repeated, and an anxious look came into her eyes. "Come in, please."

I followed her down a dim corridor to a small but tidy room. A little girl of about six was sitting at the table. Her face reminded me vaguely of Kolya's, she had the same high cheek-bones and the same grey eyes, but her expression was not so gloomy and her lips were full and sweet. When I entered she got up from her chair and looked questioningly at her mother.

"Are you a school-teacher?" the woman asked, and she too glanced at me with some apprehension.

"Yes, I am your Kolya's teacher. You are his mother, I suppose?"

"No. He is my stepson. My husband was killed at the front and now I'm left alone with these two."

She spoke without emotion but I felt at once that here was a weary, grief-stricken woman.

"I suppose Kolya's been up to some mischief?" she asked.

"Oh no, I haven't come to complain about him," I replied. "I just wanted to see how he lived."

"Well, if he makes a nuisance of himself you just tell me. His uncle will give him a good hiding. That's the rule in our family, and he knows it. Last time he broke a window in the yard his uncle thrashed him properly. But he's all right at home, Kolya is. Quite a help to me in fact. He takes care of his little sister, brings the dinner home from the canteen and chops fire-wood."

While we were talking, Kolya's little sister had come up close to me and stood listening intently to the conversation, her gaze moving from me to her mother.

"What's your name?" I asked her.

"Lida."

"She's very fond of Kolya," the mother said tenderly. "They get along fine. He takes her out walking in the park and tells her all sorts of funny stories . . . about wolves and foxes." She paused for a moment and then continued in a lower tone: "Kolya simply adored his father. When the news came that he was killed, the boy changed terribly, his face got pinched and hollow-eyed. And he used to be such a spirited lad. . . . He never talks about his father to me, but he's always telling Lida what their papa was like, how he looked and what he used to say. She doesn't remember him at all, of course. . . ."

The woman spoke in the same low, even voice, but the tears streamed down her cheeks. She did not brush them away, indeed I don't think she even noticed them. I turned away.

"We were expecting his father home all the time," she went on. "We were all ready to meet him. He was killed a week before Victory Day. The war was over when the death-notice came. . . ."

I knew I ought to have stayed for a while and asked more questions about Kolya's home life but I couldn't do it just then. Assuring Savenkova once again that I had not come with any complaint I said good-bye and left.

Kolya was waiting outside on the stairs. He gave me a look of undisguised malice as I passed him. "Went and complained, eh?" that glance said. He waited until I had gone down the steps and then turned resolutely and went into the flat, slamming the door loudly behind him.

ON THE WAY HOME

The next day I met him not far from the school. Contrary to his custom, he was walking slowly and seemed to be waiting for someone. He stopped when he saw me and waited for me to catch up with him.

"Good morning, Marina Nikolayevna," he said in a low tone.

"Good morning, Kolya," I replied.

We walked together in silence to the school and climbed upstairs to the class-room.

That day Savenkov was as quiet as a mouse. I went about all day with the feeling that something important, something wonderful had happened, although I was not yet quite sure exactly what.

The next day as I was leaving the school I met Savenkov outside in the street. He was walking up and down by the fence, his hands thrust deep in his pockets.

"What are you doing here?" I asked him.

"Nothing . . ." he answered vaguely and fell into step beside me.

I glanced sideways at him. He was deep in thought, his brows were knitted and his lips compressed. His expression struck me as being somewhat less gloomy and unpleasant than usual.

"You saw Lida, didn't you?" he asked suddenly.

"Your little sister? Yes, I met her. She looks very much like you."

"Do you think so?"

"I do indeed. I don't know whether she resembles you in character. After all, I've only seen her once."

"She's too little to have any character!" Kolya retorted.

We walked on for a while in silence. Then he said:

"Good-bye, Marina Nikolayevna," and darted into an alley.

I went on perplexed. Ours had been a curious conversation, and it had ended even more curiously. I wondered whether I had not unwittingly offended him.

From that day on Kolya waited for me nearly every day outside the school-gate and walked with me to the end of the street. Our conversation was nearly always monosyllabic. Once, after having walked almost the entire length of the street in complete silence, Kolya blurted out suddenly:

"All the things people say about stepmothers. . . . And in books too. . . . But she isn't like that at all. She's never unkind."

He was obviously referring to his own stepmother. But before I had time to open my mouth he had said good-bye hastily and disappeared round the corner.

If, as was usually the case, some of the other boys were with us, Kolya would not utter a word, and it was impossible to tell from his expression whether he was listening to the conversation or engrossed in his own thoughts.

Once, as we were hurrying home on a particularly nasty autumn afternoon, he offered to carry the bundle of copy-books I had under my arm.

"Thanks," I said. "Only take care not to crumple them."

He carefully took the thick parcel from me.

"Marina Nikolayevna," he said a few moments later, "doesn't it happen sometimes that death-notices are sent by mistake and the person can still be alive?" Pain struggled with stubborn hope in the boy's voice. "I heard about one old woman who was told that her son was killed. A man came from the front and said he had seen how it happened and he told her all about it. A month passed and one evening there was a ring at the door. 'Who's there?' she asked. And a voice on the landing answered: 'Open the door, Ma, it's me.' Her son hadn't been killed after all, he'd just been wounded...."

Kolya fell silent, his eyes searching my face earnestly.

"Yes, it does happen sometimes," I replied after a pause. "Everything is possible. You know, Kolya, my brother was killed too, and for a long time I hoped that he might come back. But it is three years now.... I'm afraid it was not a mistake."

We were standing outside my house—this time Kolya had not parted company with me at the usual corner.

"Come in for a while," I invited.

He hung back at first, but then, making up his mind, he stepped over the threshold and followed me up the stairs, slapping his hand on the banisters as he went. As I turned the key in the door I noticed that his face wore the shy, absorbed look now familiar to me.

"Take off your coat and sit down," I said when we reached my room. I put my brief-case and the bundle of copy-books away, picked up a towel and soap and went out to the bath-room to wash.

When I returned I found him standing at the book-case.

"What a lot of books you've got!" he said, running his fingers over the glass.

"You can take one if you like."

Kolya shot a swift glance at me, reddened and turned back to the bookcase.

"Oh no, I couldn't..." he faltered, surprised and incredulous.

"Go ahead," I urged him, opening the cupboard door. "Take one as a keepsake. Look, here's Chekhov's 'Kashtanka'. My teacher Anna Ivanovna gave it to me many years ago and I have kept it all this time. See, here's the inscription: 'To Marina in memory of our warm friendship during her school-days'."

"How old were you then?"

"Twelve."

"How could you be friends with your teacher?"

"We were very good friends, and we still are," I replied. "Now go ahead and choose any one you like."

Kolya's finger ran timidly over the bindings and came to rest on one of the thickest volumes on the shelf. He

pulled it out. It was *Introduction to Electrical Engineering*. It belonged to my brother. I could not suppress a smile.

"I'm afraid you'll find that rather dull," I said. "Why not try this one?" and I handed him Gorky's *Childhood*.

"Thanks," said Kolya, his flush deepening. He stuffed the book into the faded gas-mask case that served him for a satchel and moved toward the door.

"Wait a bit, where are you off to?" I cried, taken aback by this sudden departure.

"I must go. Thanks a lot, Marina Nikolayevna!"

And before I had time to detain him or to say good-bye properly he was hurrying downstairs, three steps at a time.

THE FIGHT

Kolya now sat quiet during lessons, and indeed I was only aware of him when I happened to meet his intense, concentrated gaze as I explained something to the class. Before long he brought me his home-work exercise book, into which he had copied all the lessons of the past week. His handwriting was still poor, every letter was a monstrosity, but there was not a single blot and he had left large margins on every page.

Besides giving marks I was in the habit of adding some brief comment, such as "Clean and neat", "Dirty", "Careless", or "Don't forget your margins". And this was the first thing the boys looked for when I returned their home-work. Everything was taken into account: the colour of the pencil I used, blue or red, the size of the lettering, big or small. A red pencil was considered more of an honour, a blue one, slightly less, while green or brown pencils were for some reason obnoxious.

Under Kolya's home-work I had written: "Clean, but handwriting poor".

"Let's see what you got," Gai said to him.

"I shan't," muttered Kolya as he marched to his place.

"I saw!" piped up Morozov. "Marina Nikolayevna wrote 'Clean'. But that's not fair, he rewrote everything in one go, anyone could do that. You're supposed to write properly every day."

Kolya, already back in his seat, tried to look as if none of this concerned him. By the swift glance he threw in Morozov's direction, however, I knew that he had not missed a word.

And when the lesson was over they went for each other. I barely managed to separate them. I was dreadfully discouraged! Just when I thought everything was going smoothly, they were fighting again!

I had no need to ask who had begun it, for Morozov never took part in any fights. Savenkov, of course, was the guilty one.

"What did you hit him for?"

"I'll teach him to mind his own business!"

"What are you talking about? I don't understand."

"You wrote 'Clean' in my copy-book and he had to stick his nose in: 'Everybody can do that,' he says, 'you've got to write neatly every day.'"

"Well he's right. Lessons ought always to be done neatly. But even if you had reason to be angry, do you think using your fists is the best way to settle an argument?"

"That's the only thing he can understand. It's the best way to teach him," Savenkov replied with conviction.

"What would you say if I tried that method on you?"

The effect of my words was unexpected: Savenkov looked up at me and a broad smile spread over his face, making it look extremely boyish, frank and simple.

"I won't do it again, Marina Nikolayevna," he said. "Honest I won't."

From that day on his copy-books grew steadily neater, and each time he hurried to look at what I had written beside the mark.

Kolya Savenkov did not become a good monitor, and we chose someone else in his place. But the occupant of the last desk in the right-hand corner was no longer a disturbing factor in class.

"What's happened to Savenkov these days?" Borya Levin once observed in mock surprise. "He doesn't yell or fight any more." The remark earned him a dig in the ribs from Savenkov who scowled and flushed darkly as if Borya had unwittingly intruded upon something deeply personal.

Boris was not the one to let anybody get the better of him, but this time even he evidently realized that he had spoken out of turn.

"Keep off!" he growled, but he did not return the punch.

"Keep off yourself," Savenkov retorted significantly.

GALYA

"Tell me, Galya, do the girls in your class fight much?"

We had just finished our work; I had been correcting copy-books, Galya had been doing her lessons, and now we were sitting side by side on the sofa relaxing after our labours.

"Fight?" Galya echoed in surprise. "Nobody fights in our class."

"You mean to say girls never quarrel?"

"Oh yes, but quarrelling is not the same as fighting," was Galya's philosophical rejoinder. "If any of our girls



quarrel they go right away and complain to Zinaida Pavlovna, and she decides who's right. There isn't any need to fight. I suppose your boys fight a lot, eh?"

Yes, I had to admit that my boys settled practically every difference of opinion with their fists, and there was nothing I could do about it. But somehow I did not care much for the method chosen by Galya's classmates. "They go and complain," she said. No, that was not the right way either.

"Tell me about your boys," Galya begged me. "Have the Vorobeiko brothers been staying away from school again? Show me Sasha's copy-book. And Vasya's too."

Galya already knew all my boys by name and she

could even recognize their handwriting. She loved to run through their copy-books, and see what marks I had given, and the low marks interested her as much as the "fives". I noticed, however, that she was reluctant to talk about her own school.

All that summer Galya had looked forward eagerly to school. It had been her sole topic of conversation from morning till night, and she could think of nothing else.

School had taken complete possession of her thoughts. The words "class", "teacher", "text-books" she uttered with something akin to reverence. On September 1, the first day of the term, Galya got up at five in the morning and wanted to rush off to school then and there.

She had not been a pupil for many days when she began begging her grandmother to get her a school uniform. "All the girls wear one," she said in a voice in which appeal and demand, hope and despair were mingled. She insisted that the uniform was absolutely essential and she reminded her grandmother about it every day. And finally Galya got her uniform, a brown dress with a black apron. She flew off to school as if borne on wings.

It was a very different Galya who returned that afternoon from school.

"Well," I asked, "what did Zinaida Pavlovna say about your uniform?"

"She didn't say anything," Galya answered in a flat voice. "She's funny. She kept telling me about it herself and now she doesn't seem pleased at all."

A curious change came over Galya.

One morning her grandmother had difficulty in waking her; she did not want to go to school. "But why?" we wanted to know. "What's happened?" After much coaxing

the story finally came out. Zinaida Pavlovna, she told us, had set the girls the task of tying ten matches together, as part of their home-work. "I did tie them, Granny saw me. But when I got to school the thread broke. I took out a reel of thread and began tying the matches up again; but Zinaida Pavlovna saw me and said: 'What do you mean by doing your home-work in class? I'll have to give you a "two" for that.' I told her the thread had broken and she turned to the class and said: 'Girls, which of you saw her doing her home task in the class-room?' Lena put up her hand and said she did. So Zinaida Pavlovna said I hadn't been telling the truth. Why did she believe Lena and not me?"

"Stuff and nonsense!" said Granny. "She didn't mean any harm, I'm sure of it. Now hurry up or you'll be late for school."

Galya put on her coat, picked up her books and left the house, but when she passed my window I could not help noticing how dejected she looked as she set out that morning for school.

One day Galya had some trouble with her home-work. Besides making several mistakes she managed to get a nasty blot on the page. Much upset, she bracketed the whole page and wrote underneath in large letters: "This is bad. I shall do it over." And she rewrote every word. Her teacher crossed out the whole page with red pencil and gave Galya a "two". I noticed that Galya no longer went to the trouble of correcting her own mistakes after that.

Neither of these incidents may be especially important in themselves, yet I saw that from day to day Galya's love for school was waning. For me this was an extremely serious and important lesson. It taught me that even a

child of seven must be treated with respect as a sensitive human being, responsive to warmth and kindness and unforgiving of indifference and injustice.

THE VOROBEEKO BROTHERS

The Vorobeikos, Sasha and Vasya, whom Galya had asked after, confident that they "had been staying away from school again," were twins. Sasha had come into the world only one hour before Vasya but he behaved as if he were at least five years older. Vasya was his obedient slave. Indeed, he worshipped his brother, trusted him implicitly and tried to imitate him in everything. Outwardly there was scarcely any resemblance between them. Sasha was tall, with a long face and small impudent eyes. Vasya was short, good-natured and snub-nosed, with a brown birth mark over his right eyebrow which gave his face a rather amusing expression of permanent surprise. They had both failed to pass into a higher form and came to my class from another school in the middle of October.

My acquaintance with Sasha Vorobeiko began rather inauspiciously. During the long break I left the class-room with the boys as usual. When I returned I discovered that my hand-bag which I had left on the desk beside a pile of copy-books was missing. I looked in the desk-drawer, in the cupboard and elsewhere in the room but there was no sign of the bag.

"What are you looking for, Marina Nikolayevna?" Ryabinin asked.

"My hand-bag. I left it here and it's gone."

"Where are the Vorobeikos? Sasha was on duty, he stayed behind in the class-room," several boys volunteered.

But the Vorobeikos were missing too. Neither Sasha nor Vasya was to be found. They had gone without saying a word. They turned up the next day.

"Where's the hand-bag?" the boys demanded.

"What hand-bag?" Sasha wanted to know.

"You were on duty in class yesterday; the hand-bag was on the table, but when Marina Nikolayevna came back after break you had gone and so had the bag," Ryabinin said in a calm, stern voice.

"I didn't see any hand-bag."

"Well, you were on duty and you're responsible," Ryabinin insisted firmly. "Why did you leave the class?"

"Because I had to, that's why."

And with these words Sasha planked himself down on his seat without so much as a glance in Lyosha's direction.

I ought to have intervened at this point and told Sasha that he had no right to leave the class whenever he felt like it, especially in the middle of lessons. No doubt the other boys were expecting me to say something of the kind. But I said nothing. To tell the honest truth I shrank from saying anything. "The hand-bag doesn't matter," I told myself and decided to let the matter drop.

But, of course, the matter did not end there. A week later Gai discovered that a box of coloured pencils was missing, and several days after that, Labutin's pencil-case disappeared. The class buzzed like a hornets' nest. Both at break and after school the boys could talk of nothing else.

"It all began with the hand-bag," I overheard one of them say.

"If I knew who it was I'd teach the rotter!" Glazkov, a quiet lad as a rule, stuttered with indignation.

The Vorobeikos alone,—Sasha, and of course Vasya,—appeared to be utterly unconcerned about what had happened and took no part in the debates. They missed lessons, did not bother to do any home-work, and it would have been hard to find any mark other than "two" beside their names in the school-register.

My own behaviour, I admit, was absurd. "Naturally he is laughing at me up his sleeve, thinks I'm blind or afraid of him," I told myself, thinking of the "elder" Vorobeiko, but I continued to say nothing.

"Next time we'll have to search everybody," Ryabinin observed. "There's nothing worse than going about suspecting one another and distrusting everybody, while one louse does what he pleases."

But I could not imagine myself going through the boys' satchels, knowing that all but one were perfectly innocent. How would I feel in their place if my belongings were searched? I had not forgotten the lesson I had learned from Galya. I knew that self-respect and pride are qualities all human beings possess, however tender their age. And when Ryabinin said to me: "Marina Nikolayevna, why don't you do something about it? It's quite obvious that the Vorobeikos are the culprits," I said: "Nobody actually saw them do it, Lyosha! What if we were to be mistaken?"

"But we're not mistaken, Marina Nikolayevna! You'll see!"

And I did. One day a militiaman came into the common-room. Greeting me politely, he said: "Permit me to take your pupil Alexander Vorobeiko with me to the

militia station, there is a serious charge against him," and he handed me a sheet of paper covered with writing.

I glanced at it but was too upset to grasp the contents properly. I read something about a truck-load of apples which Sasha and some friends of his had rifled. "Here you have a simple way out," the thought flashed through my mind. "They'll take him away and that will be the end of it." But suddenly I heard myself saying:

"No, Vorobeiko is my pupil, I can't let him leave the class before lessons are over. I shall go to the station this evening and see your chief." The militiaman withdrew.

When I went out into the corridor later I saw a crowd of boys outside the common-room. The news had spread quickly. Back in the class-room the uproar had not yet subsided, and I overheard someone say reproachfully to Sasha:

"See how Marina Nikolayevna stuck up for you."

And although the young rascal was still pale from the shock he had received, he managed to mutter through clenched teeth: "Nobody asked her to."

Immediately after lessons I went to Sasha's home. The boy's father, a tall, heavily-built man with massive shoulders, received me politely. He invited me to sit down, took a seat opposite me and listened carefully to what I had to say.

"I don't doubt it was Sasha who stole the things from the class-room," he said when I had finished. "You can be sure of that. And to tell you the truth, Marina Nikolayevna, I've given him up as a bad job long ago. Believe me, there's only one way out for him and that's the reformatory."

"Surely not," I murmured, taken aback, but he went on:

"I mean it. What can I do when I'm out at work all day long and the boys are left entirely to themselves. I could, of course, send Sasha to the village to my wife, but do you think she'd be able to manage him? She's got two others to take care of as it is. The trouble is he's ruining his brother too. Before you know it he'll be going in for real crime. Yes, he's got quite out of hand."

He said this without the slightest bitterness, in fact he spoke of his son's misdemeanours as calmly as if he were discussing some neighbour in the next house, the passers-by in the street, or the inhabitants of Mars, if any such exist.

What could I do? Moralize, wax indignant, point out that as the father of my two pupils he ought to be my assistant and ally instead of talking about his own children as if they were strangers?

"You will forgive me, but it seems to me that it is your own fault if your boys have got out of hand," I said, shrinking inwardly at the sharpness of my tone. After all, the man was at least twice my age. But I could not help myself. "How could you speak so lightly of sending Sasha to the reformatory? No one has the right to shift the burden of responsibility for bringing up his children on to the shoulders of others."

"If you want to know, I don't believe in all these theories about bringing up children by reasoning with them: 'Sasha, be a good boy and don't steal. Stop it, Sasha....' No, he's got to be punished. In the reformatory school they will find ways of controlling him. You and I can't do anything with him. I'm sorry if you don't agree with me, but I say what I think."

I left him in a turmoil. The man's calm indifference drove me wild. Yet what could I do about Sasha? His own father considered him hopeless, and indeed he was growing up to be a thief and a liar as well. How could I change him? Would it not be better after all to entrust him to firmer and more experienced people?

These thoughts gave me no rest. Standing by the kitchen-stove, waiting for the kettle to boil, I had a heated mental argument with Vorobeiko senior. The voice of my neighbour, Marya Fyodorovna, brought me to myself with a start.

"Marina, whatever is the matter with you? Your kettle has been boiling for ages. . . . Why do you look so tired this evening?"

"She's not tired. It's upset she is, I can see that," said Tatyana Ivanovna. "What's wrong, dear? Tell us."

"It's. . . . Well, there's a boy in my class who steals. A militiaman came to school for him today."

"What about his parents?" Tatyana Ivanovna asked.

"His mother's in the village, and his father says the only thing to be done with him is to send him to the reformatory school."

"Splendid ideal!" exclaimed Marya Fyodorovna. "What are you upset about in that case? If the father thinks so, the boy will be taken away and you will be rid of him."

This piece of advice was evidently what decided me. I hastily drank down a cup of tea and went to the militia.

"Yes," I was told in the juvenile delinquents' department, "there's a whole gang of them in that yard. But they're the small fry, their leader is obviously older and more experienced. Your Vorobeiko was not caught red-handed, but now we'll see about him. . . . Not summon him? Why shouldn't we summon him? You'll vouch for

him, you say? (At this point I was subjected to searching scrutiny—evidently they were trying to decide whether I could be accepted as a trustee.) Are you quite certain you know what it means to vouch for someone? It means that if anything happens you will be held responsible. . . . Very well, we'll give him another chance. Have you a telephone? No? Your address then. Very good, we'll keep in touch with you."

The next day after lessons I asked Sasha to stay behind. We waited until the others had left and then Sasha and I had our first serious talk. It was a rather one-sided affair however, because Sasha maintained a stubborn silence.

"You needn't worry about that business with the apples," I told him. "I went to the militia yesterday and vouched for you. But I want to talk to you about something else. You know about the frequent thefts that have been occurring in class. That's a most unpleasant thing. I simply can't imagine who is to blame. (Sasha threw a swift glance at me in which I thought I read a hint of amusement.) Anyhow here's what I wanted to ask you. I want you to take charge of the cupboard. You know we keep all our books and things there. Here's the key, take it and see that everything is in order."

To do Sasha justice he looked at that key as if it were a rattlesnake. He did everything he could to resist the honour I was conferring upon him.

"I can't . . . I don't know. . . . But . . . but I'll be responsible? How can I do it?"

Nevertheless I saw to it that he took the key.

Why did I take this step? It was not a hasty decision, I had gone over this conversation the day before and had spent most of the night pondering the problem. It seemed

to me that by doing this I would be appealing to the better side of Sasha's nature.

I remembered the film *The Road to Life* and how the director of the colony for homeless waifs (the part was played by that wonderful actor Batalov) had trusted the thief Mustafa with a large sum of money. I recalled the stern, anxious expression on Batalov's face, his knitted brows, the unspoken question that troubled him: would Mustafa return or would he abscond with the money? The spectators could not but share his anxiety. But Mustafa returned: the great confidence unexpectedly reposed in him altered his whole attitude to life. This was so true to life that one could not help believing in it. And I remembered too my favourite book *The Road to Life* by Anton Semyonovich Makarenko, the distinguished teacher and author, and the wise and simple thought expressed in it: "The more you respect your pupils and the more you ask of them, the better." Makarenko believed this to be the most important precept for a teacher. And he himself was always guided by it. Once, for instance, he gave a chit for five hundred rubles to Karabanov, an ex-thief, and when the latter brought the money and insisted that Makarenko count it, Anton Semyonovich replied firmly: "I know you're as honest as I am. I always knew that, you saw that, didn't you?" It was a bold move on Makarenko's part, but his faith in the intrinsic decency of another human being had its effect.

Why then did I derive no satisfaction out of my talk with Sasha? Why did it leave me vaguely uneasy, and why did our talk seem so false and unnatural? Evidently it is a mistake merely to imitate someone else's actions; one must think for oneself, and find one's own solution for each problem that faces one.

The thefts in our class ceased, but my mind was not at rest. The Vorobeiko brothers continued to behave as if they did not belong to the class. They played truant more and more often, and one day Ryabinin came to me and said: "Marina Nikolayevna, Vorobeiko turned over the key of the cupboard to me. 'You'd better take care of the books,' he says. 'I'm hardly ever at school anyway.' So I took it. Is it all right?"

"Yes, it's all right," I replied wearily.

OUR PIONEER LEADER

Life flowed on. We started a class newspaper called *Friendship*, and put out a special issue devoted exclusively to Hero of the Soviet Union Alexander Matrosov.

There had been another important event in our lives: our class had acquired a Pioneer leader. His name was Lyova Vilensky and he was in the ninth form. I had seen him several times in Natalya Andreyevna's class. He had been her pupil in the primary school and they had remained great friends. Hardly a day passed without Lyova running in to see her either during break or after school. I believe it was Natalya Andreyevna who had suggested that the Komsomol Committee assign Lyova to my class.

"You will find him an excellent assistant," she told me. "He is a lad you can rely on."

Lyova had come to her class during the war at the age of eleven and had been evacuated with the school to Gorky Region. Both children and teachers had had a hard time of it there, especially in the beginning. There was no fire-wood to heat the school premises and it was so cold that the ink froze in the ink-wells and the children

had difficulty in holding their pencils in their numb, swollen fingers. There was no electricity, and the long winter evenings had been spent in the flickering light of three improvised wick lamps. But Lyova had shown himself to be one of those who do not lose heart in the face of difficulties. No one ever heard a word of complaint from him, and he never shirked any task. He was very handy at a great many things and was quick to learn. Natalya Andreyevna told me that during the summer the children had helped the neighbouring collective farm, working in the fields and the vegetable plots. Most of the children had some difficulty in getting accustomed to the work—this too was a test not only of endurance but of grit. The thin, near-sighted Lyova passed this test with flying colours.

"You will see for yourself how helpful he can be," Natalya Andreyevna said, adding with a smile: "Ask him about his machine-shop and you'll win him over at once!"

I did, and this is what he told me:

"In 1944 when we returned from evacuation the first thing we did was to run to school and inspect the building and the grounds. In the corner of the yard stood a shed which had once housed a machine-shop of some kind. We looked in. It was dark and filthy inside, the floor had settled on one side and there were piles of rubbish everywhere, heaps of metal scrap, wrecked, abandoned machines covered with rust. Everything was in terrible shape. Well, we rolled up our sleeves and got to work. Couldn't very well leave it that way, could we? Anatoli Dmitrievich and our teachers pitched in too. . . . And you ought to see a fine workshop we fixed up! It was all perfectly voluntary of course, only those who wanted to, worked . . . well, I was one of those who wanted to."

I happened to know that he had been the moving spirit of the whole business from the very first.

"And what did you make in that workshop of yours?" I asked.

"Drive shafts for tanks!" Lyova replied. But what pride of achievement was expressed in that reply! And indeed the lad had something to be proud of.

Incidentally, Lyova and I were old friends already when the above conversation took place. But when he first came to the class, a tall thin lad wearing eye-glasses, the boys could not conceal their disappointment.

"DEFT HANDS"

He was a polite, soft-spoken lad this Lyova, but unfortunately these were qualities that did not impress my class.

"Mamma's boy," was Borya Levin's comment.

"Wears specs!" Vyruchka remarked with disdain.

"You ought to see the Pioneer leader 5-A has! He's the best goalie in school," Labutin summed up.

I told them they ought to be ashamed of themselves, that Lyova was a good Komsomol member, the best boy in his class. But no amount of praise on my part could recommend Lyova as effectively as his own actions.

Shortly after he had made the acquaintance of the class Lyova said to me: "Marina Nikolayevna, let's have a class poll consisting of one question: 'What would you like to do in your spare time?'"

"Why a poll? We could simply ask the boys to say what they are particularly interested in, couldn't we?"

"Yes, but the trouble is some would tell us, and some wouldn't. I think a poll would be better."

I agreed. We told the boys to hand in their answers in writing. We got a great many answers, all of them showing a desire for knowledge, a desire to learn to do things. There was so much they wanted to know!

"Is there life on other planets?"

"Will the sun ever grow cold?"

"How did the first man appear on earth?"

"How do you mend an electric kettle?"

"How can you assemble a radio set?"

Borya Levin's wish was briefly but energetically expressed: "I want to learn how to glue rubber." Though he did not explain why he wanted to learn just that, Lyova and I understood that the practical-minded Borya wanted to know what to do if the bladder of his football should burst.

Lyova called the boys together to discuss the new venture.

"Why should there be circles for drawing, singing and dancing but none where you can learn to make things?" he said to the boys. "Let's organize a work circle. We ought to be able to do all sorts of things. It's too bad if you have to be baffled by a broken stool or a burnt-out fuse. A boy I know can't even sew a button on, he tags after his mother, or his sister, or his granny all day begging them to sew it on for him, and if they haven't the time he goes out without it."

"You're not suggesting we start a sewing circle by any chance?" Borya Levin put in with fine irony.

"That wouldn't be such a bad idea as you think," Lyova replied imperturbably, paying no heed to the snickers of the boys. "Only I'm afraid I wouldn't be able to lead a circle like that. I can manage to sew on a button, but I can't cut or sew clothes. However I can teach you to

mend electric fixtures, irons, kettles and so on. I can show Borya Levin how to glue rubber. And I can make a model of a radio set as well."

At first only seven boys signed up for the circle, but before long there were 15 of them.

There had always been a great deal of trouble attached to showing lantern slides in class. There were no curtains or blinds on the windows, and much time and energy had always been wasted in rigging up some makeshift blinds which invariably failed us at the critical moment.

Lyova's circle began its practical activities by making dark paper blinds on rollers so that we could "black out" at any moment. Later on Lyova taught them to mend their own galoshes. After that they made a book-shelf for the class-room.

Lyova was indeed an extremely handy youngster. He could do everything, and whatever he did was done quickly and well. He was a first-class chess-player and none of the boys in my class was able to beat him. He could answer any question. He knew what made bonfires crackle, why there are no red, yellow or blue flowers in fir-woods, why there are many fallen trees in forests and why a solitary tree in a field is better able to resist the impact of the wind.

I saw that the boys tried to imitate Lyova. He knew the Morse code very well and soon they were all tapping out messages on their desks.

"Here's how you can memorize it, Marina Nikolayevna," they would explain to me excitedly, "a syllable with the letter 'a' stands for a dot! Any other syllable stands for a dash. If you forget the signal for a letter you only have to remember a word beginning with that letter and pronounce it by syllables and you've got it!"

Lyova promised to take the boys on a hiking tour. Thanks to him we already had an emergency first-aid kit tucked away in the cupboard. Yura Labutin was elected "first-aid orderly" and the thrilling prospect of a hiking tour at some future date kept the boys in a state of eager anticipation.

"I STOLE THE APPLES TOO..."

In preparation for the New Year fir-tree celebrations we decided to stage some of Krylov's fables and put on a number of charades.

The Vorobeiko brothers, as usual, held aloof from all this. Occasionally, however, they too stayed behind after lessons, but only as outsiders, uninterested spectators. As a matter of fact, we did not feel quite at ease in their presence.

I found an amusing sketch and read it to the boys. The characters in it were a teacher and two pupils, one pupil standing at the blackboard fumbling for the right answer, and the other prompting him from his seat. We tried to act it. Trofimov as the teacher was not too convincing but not too bad on the whole—he was a terribly severe pedagogue with a cold dry manner of speaking and was totally unmoved by his pupil's predicament. Volodya Rumyantsev, as the prompter, on the other hand, suited the part perfectly: he hissed with all his might, gesticulated wildly with his hands, his eyes popping out with the exertion. He was very funny. Kira Glazkov as the boy at the blackboard, however, was less successful. He repeated the lines faithfully enough but the result was flat and unconvincing.

"Perhaps Volodya and Kira ought to change places?" Lyova suggested. "Maybe Volodya will be as good at picking up the prompter's signals as he is at prompting."

The others laughed. Suddenly Sasha Vorobeiko piped up.

"Let me have a shot!"

"What's that?" I asked, so surprised that I didn't catch his meaning at first.

"Let me try to do Kira's part."

There was quite an uproar at this, but Kira said eagerly:

"That's an idea, maybe he can do it!"

Sasha went over to the blackboard. He put such expression into his lines, gave such an amusing and faithful impersonation of the lazy pupil stammering and sluttering in a vain effort to hear the prompter's whispers that we could not help laughing and applauding him. I saw at once that Sasha Vorobeiko was not indifferent to praise. He flushed pink and his eyes sparkled, and although he tried hard to preserve his customary blasé air he did not quite succeed.

On Saturday we had another rehearsal. The next day being Sunday, we could afford to stay a little longer in school. After lessons I sent the boys home for dinner. Sasha was the first to come back. When the rehearsal began we saw that he had not been wasting his time since the last meeting of our "dramatics circle." He had thought of quite a few amusing additions to his role. He pretended to be reading something on his palm, or stealthily pulled a tiny slip of paper from his pocket and consulted it now and again.

With his eyes glued to the teacher's face, he craned his neck toward the prompter on his left, stood on tiptoe,

his whole body twisted at such an angle and his eyebrows lifted in an expression of such concentration that his left ear seemed to grow bigger before our very eyes! He was terribly proud of his efforts, and well he might be for at the New Year's party his performance was unquestionably the best.

From that time on Sasha was perhaps the most enthusiastic member of our dramatics group and was always eager for new roles.

He was given a "tragic" part once, but it soon became clear that comic roles were more his style. I was ready to sacrifice "art" for the sake of keeping Sasha with us, but I feared that the boys, who were severe critics, would take the part away from him. This, however, did not happen. Instead, they offered advice from the side-lines: "Put a bit more feeling into your voice, can't you?" "Tone it down a little, what are you shouting for? And stop waving your hands around like a windmill."

Sasha kept the role.

It is difficult for me to describe the actual process of Sasha's metamorphosis because it was not marked by any notable events. I only know that I began to find him much more easy to handle. He and I were almost friends by now and that kept him considerably in check. After having taken part the evening before in a heated discussion along with the others about some new charade we were planning to put on, Sasha could not very well come to school the next morning without having done his lessons or make a bad showing at the blackboard. And, of course, if Sasha did his lessons, then Vasya did them too. And what was most important, they ceased behaving as outsiders in the class.

Much later Sasha confessed to me: "Marina Nikolayevna, you know it was me who stole the things that time, and I stole the apples too. . . ."

"I know," I replied.

"I thought as much," he said with a sigh.

There you are, I said to myself, the familiar formula from the pedagogical text-book: "Sasha was an unruly, disobedient pupil. His teacher persuaded him to join the class dramatics circle and soon he was making good progress at his studies and helping the teacher." So such things did happen in real life after all, it was only necessary to find the right approach to each child, to discover where his interests lay, to search carefully until you found the secret spring that governed his behaviour.

THE FUR CAP

Looking into the class-room as usual on my way home from school one evening, I saw Lyova surrounded by a group of boys: Gai, Goryunov, Ilyinsky, Vyruchka, Sasha Vorobeiko and Ryabinin. Lyova was talking earnestly to them, addressing himself chiefly to Lyosha Ryabinin who looked flushed and upset.

"The money wasn't yours to do what you liked with," I heard Lyova say.

"He didn't spend it on himself, did he?" Sasha Vorobeiko objected.

I couldn't imagine what they were talking about.

"Why did he have to go and buy it anyway?" Lyova said angrily. "It's the school that ought to do it and not him. Why should Savenkov take presents from him?"

"But it won't be from me, it'll be from all of us!" Lyosha cried indignantly.

I felt it was time to intervene. "What's the trouble?" I asked.

They all began talking at once and it was quite some time before I finally gathered what was in question.

We had a permanent class fund of about seventy rubles. The money was used to buy coloured paper, paints, reproductions of the portraits of our favourite authors and now and again a book to add to our class library. The money was usually kept in the cupboard, but somehow by tacit consent Lyosha Ryabinin had come to be the treasurer. A practical-minded youngster, he always seemed to know what ought to be bought. He had noticed that Kolya Savenkov had been going about in the cold weather wearing a thin cap, and so he had taken money from the class fund and bought a fur cap. Five minutes before he had handed it to the astonished Lyova with the words: "Here, give this to Savenkov."

The Pioneer leader had been trying to explain that "private charity" was out of place here, that Kolya Savenkov might indeed take offence at being the object of such charity and that such things are done by the school authorities and not by individuals. But Lyosha, backed by the others, stood firm: why should Savenkov take offence at his own classmates? After all, Lyosha had not bought the cap with his own money but with money from the common, class fund.

"In the first place you ought to have asked my advice and Lyova's before buying it," I said. "Why didn't you say anything to us?"

"But, Marina Nikolayevna, there wasn't time!" Lyosha argued. "I was looking for glue and thumb-tacks and that portrait of Chekhov you asked me to get. I had the

money with me. And I see this here cap. See how nice and warm it is! So I bought it. How could I pass up a good chance like that? If I'd gone to consult you or Lyova about it I bet it wouldn't have been there by the time I got back."

Lyova and I exchanged glances and I am certain that his thoughts at that moment were the same as mine. Neither he nor I had noticed that Kolya Savenkov's cap was thin and shabby and that it would be a good thing to buy him another. We could hardly scold Lyosha for having been more thoughtful and considerate than ourselves.

"You are right, of course, Lyova," I said finally. "But after all what's done is done. I suppose we might as well give Kolya the cap. There wouldn't be much sense in taking it back to the shop."

Lyova looked grave. He paced the floor once or twice, as he always did when seriously perturbed.

"That's all very well," he said, "but how are we going to do it?"

"Let's present it to him at the next rally!" cried Vitya Ilyinsky.

I shuddered. Was it possible that the boys would decide to do a thing like that. To my intense relief Sasha Vorobeiko quashed the motion.

"Rot! You'll be ordering a brass band next!" was his scornful comment.

"No. One of us must do it. Better let Lyova give it to him. Otherwise Kolya will be embarrassed," Sasha Gai suggested.

"If you ask me, the best thing would be to give it to Kolya's mother. Say it's from the school and that's all. She'll give it to him herself," said Tolya Goryunov.

"That's right! That's what we'll do!" said Vorobeiko in a tone of finality.

And so it was decided. Lyova took the ill-starred fur cap (incidentally, to do Lyosha justice, it really was a fine warm cap) to Savenkov's mother.

"'Here's a new hat for Kolya from the school,' I told her," Lyova related to me afterwards. "At first she seemed surprised and tried to refuse, but I told her the school board had decided that Kolya's head had to be kept warm so his brains would work better." The faintly deprecatory smile that accompanied these words told me that Lyova had said nothing of the kind, that he had actually been a great deal more tactful and kind but that his natural reserve prevented him from repeating to me the kind and heart-felt words he had spoken to his schoolmate's mother. "She thanked me and now everything's all right."

WITHOUT FANFARE

I said nothing more about the hat and the incident appeared to be closed. Some ten days later, however, the quiet well-mannered Lyova, who never came to the common-room without excusing himself for intruding, literally burst into the room and thrust a sheet of paper thickly covered with writing under my nose.

"Just look at this, Marina Nikolayevna!" he cried. "They actually want to put this in the school paper!"

Before he had a chance to explain, the editor of the newspaper, Yuri Laptev, a tenth-form boy, came in. Throwing a look of undisguised disapproval at Lyova, he came over to me, wearing the aggrieved but patient

expression of an adult waiting for a child's tantrums to subside.

I picked up the paper and read the following:

"An Act of Comradely Consideration"

"Consideration for others is an integral quality of Soviet people and one that ought to be instilled in our rising generation. Sazonov of 9-B fell ill recently and could not attend school. His classmates visited him at home, brought him his home-work and gave him a brief outline of the lessons. When Sazonov recovered and returned to school he found that he had not fallen behind the rest of the class. Valdman, Pavlovsky and Glebov were particularly helpful to Sazonov.

"Here is another example of comradely consideration. When the boys of Class 4-C learned that Kolya Savenkov's family was in straitened circumstances and that Kolya, having no warm hat to wear, could not attend school regularly, they clubbed together and bought him a cap, thus proving themselves to be good comrades and real Pioneers."

"No," I said, "you can't print that."

"But why not, Marina Nikolayevna?" Laptev demanded in a tone of hurt surprise.

But before I had time to reply Anatoli Dmitrievich, who had been sitting at his desk and had overheard the conversation, came over.

"Let me see it, please," he asked, putting on his spectacles.

He read the item carefully.

"Who wrote this?" he asked Laptev. "The language is rather stiff and official, don't you think?"

"It isn't written very well," the lad agreed, "but that isn't the reason Lyova and Marina Nikolayevna are against publishing it. I consider that it ought to go in: the boys must learn from good examples."

"That's quite right," Anatoli Dmitrievich agreed in his turn. "But if you ask me, an item like this can teach



the boys only one thing. . . ." (He fell silent, and slowly—deliberately so, I believe—proceeded to wipe his glasses and put them back into their case. The boys waited impatiently for him to finish.) . . . "In my opinion it can only teach them to be inconsiderate and tactless," Anatoli Dmitrievich concluded. "Now consider yourself, what is remarkable about the boys visiting Sazonov when he was ill? Would you have expected them to neglect him? Or take that hat incident—why make such a fuss about it?

Merely in order to show Savenkov what kind and generous classmates he has? In that case you ought to have presented the hat to him at a full-dress Pioneer rally with the drums rolling!" ("That's exactly what Sasha Vorobeiko said!" I thought to myself.) "Don't you think, Yura, that Savenkov's feelings might be hurt? After all, you must consider his pride, his dignity. Why make such a fuss about a simple matter?"

Laptev bit his lip. He still appeared to be unconvinced.

"I understand, Anatoli Dmitrievich," he said after a pause.

The bell rang at that juncture and we went to our respective class-rooms. After lessons, however, the common-room reverted to the subject.

"I don't think we ought to blame our editor too much," Natalya Andreyevna said to me. "Not when people can write this sort of thing." She handed me an open book.

"... For example, when any of the children reports that he has helped some old woman in his house to carry wood, the fact is brought to the attention of the other children and he is publicly commended for his action," I read.

"That was written by a Moscow school-teacher," Natalya Andreyevna explained, "an experienced educator, not a 17-year-old wall-newspaper editor. Yet like that boy she believes in the power of good example, which in itself is correct. But can you imagine how that boy swells with pride when the others commend him—*commend*, mind you! And what for? For helping an old woman carry firewood! Instead of restraining the impulse to boast, to indulge in fine phrases and extravagant gestures, they shower the child with praise!"

Natalya Andreyevna rose heavily from the sofa where she had been sitting. A dark flush had mantled her cheeks and her thick brows were knit. I had never seen her so incensed.

"And so he will go on doing 'good deeds' solely for the sake of winning the praise and approval of those around him, acting always with an eye to his audience," she went on. "But what if there is no audience? In that case I suppose he will wonder whether it is worth while being good. . . ."

There were a good many of us in the room, including several other young teachers like myself, and we all listened to Natalya Andreyevna with interest.

"How many times have we read about the boy who found a purse with money and returned it to its owner," she said. "What a noble thing for him to do! But for heaven's sake, what else should he have done? Keep the purse? We might as well praise youngsters for not fighting, not swearing and not stealing? Why treat a perfectly unremarkable, perfectly normal and proper action as something extraordinary? As if it were a remarkable moral feat not to take possession of someone else's belongings!"

"I'm afraid I don't quite agree with you," Elena Mikhailovna, the biology teacher, said thoughtfully. "We read sometimes about children who prevent train-wrecks or rescue people from drowning—would you say such things ought not to be written about?"

"But surely that isn't the same thing!" cried Natalya Andreyevna. "It is true that children have averted train-wrecks and gone into burning buildings to save people. That sort of thing requires courage, resolution, the readiness to risk your own safety for the sake of others.

But one has only to be honest not to appropriate money or articles that don't belong to one!"

"You are quite right, Natalya Andreyevna," said Victor Mikhailovich, physics instructor in the senior classes, a new-comer to the school like myself. "It goes without saying that children must be told of good and noble actions, but the subject must be approached sensibly and without fanfare. When the *form* of an action is stressed instead of the *substance* there is a danger of evoking the desire not so much to do good as to be praised for doing it."

I valued those common-room discussions very much. They occurred sometimes on the most minor pretext. One of us would come in from a lesson feeling upset or elated, thoughtful or perplexed, and relate some incident that had just occurred in class. The others would listen with interest and perhaps a heated argument would follow, or simply a quiet talk as one or another of us would "think aloud."

Of course, we all knew how important it is for the young to learn from good examples. A good action, a vivid personality, a fine thought evoke an immediate response in the children, a desire to emulate them.

But how was one to approach the subject? I quite agreed with Victor Mikhailovich—calmly and without fanfare.

A PARENTS' MEETING

It was not until October, at the end of the first quarter, that I held my first parents' meeting.

I realized later that it would have been better had I waited in the class-room and met the parents as they arrived. In that way I would have made the acquaintance

of each of them separately and that would have made it easier to talk to all of them afterwards. But instead I sat in the common-room with a book until seven o'clock, the appointed time. And, of course, when I did go to the class-room I was nervous, nearly as nervous, I believe, as I had been at my first lesson.

I found about twelve people waiting for me. It seemed to me that they all eyed me with disapproval and were wishing that their children could have had an older and more experienced teacher. I outlined the programme of the fourth form, explained what a difficult and important term this was for the pupils and asked them to see to it that their children were able to do their lessons at home undisturbed. I did not speak well, my voice was cold and formal, and although I had prepared for the meeting beforehand I found myself fumbling for words. "It is exceedingly important to create normal conditions in the home for study," I heard myself saying. Now, all my life I had loathed that dry, formal manner of speaking. And I was horrified when I thought what an unpleasant impression I must be making on the parents. "Poor children," they must be thinking, "to have such a dry-as-dust creature teaching them."

When I had finished, an elderly woman in a woollen shawl, who was sitting in the front row, said:

"The boys are very fond of you, Marina Nikolayevna. Mine begins talking about you the minute he comes home from school. Teacher said this, teacher said that. Why, it's teacher, teacher all the time."

I felt myself blushing to my ears, and I did not know what to say.

"Oh yes, they're very pleased, and that's a fact," put in a round-faced woman with bright blue eyes (I knew

by those eyes that this must be Sasha Gai's mother). "My lad says, 'We've got an awfully nice teacher, she calls us all by our first names, she laughs and cracks jokes during lessons, but she knows how to explain things.'"

"That's all very well, but you ought to be more strict with them."

This came from a man whose swarthy complexion, gypsy-type face and coal-black hair reminded me at once of Seryozha Selivanov. Seryozha had the same slow, deliberate manner of speaking and tried to imitate his father's deep bass voice.

The other parents turned to look at the speaker.

"I wouldn't say that," objected the woman in the woollen shawl, "it depends on the child."

"I don't know about others, but my boy needs a firm hand," Selivanov insisted. "And I believe it wouldn't hurt the others too. Boys need to be disciplined, there's no doubt about that. I would ask you," he turned to me, "to let me know if my youngster gets out of hand. A good hiding will do the trick!"

"Thanks for warning me," I said, my nervousness vanishing. "Now I shall not ask your help, no matter how naughty your Seryozha may be. Don't you know that you mustn't beat children?"

"Why not? I was beaten in my childhood, and I grew up all right."

Before I had a chance to retort, a thin little woman sitting in the corner who had been silent till then spoke up:

"That's all nonsense. These aren't the old times, they don't allow children to be punished or humiliated in school like they did in the old days."

"I said at home, not at school," Selivanov argued calmly. "And there's nothing humiliating about it. What's wrong in a father giving his lad a hiding now and then to teach him? It's for his own good, isn't it?"

"Good!" snorted Sasha's mother. "No, Comrade, you're all wrong. But perhaps you're joking?"

"Oh no, I'm not joking. But I don't think you understand me aright. I don't believe in beating children within an inch of their lives. But I do think a little hiding now and again won't do them any harm."

"No," I said. "We might as well agree to start with, Comrades, that I shall not be able to ask your help and advice unless you promise me that you won't resort to such methods."

"You are very young, you know," Selivanov remarked with a note of sympathy rather than annoyance in his voice.

"Youth is no crime," observed a tall man in glasses. "In this case, for instance, we see youth arguing most sensibly."

I threw him a grateful glance. Selivanov shrugged his shoulders, but he was evidently ill at ease. It was clear that he was in a minority of one.

Having finished my report, I closed the meeting and they all crowded round my desk.

"Now let us get acquainted," said the man in the glasses. "My name is Goryunov. I am Tolya's father."

"And I'm Sasha Gai's mother," said the blue-eyed woman, confirming my guess.

"I'm Rumyantseva," the thin woman who had taken part in the argument with Selivanov introduced herself. "Tell me, how is Volodya behaving? I hope he doesn't make a nuisance of himself?"

She was quite young and so slight she could be taken for a mere girl, and I could not help thinking that Volodya would soon be taller than his mother.

Kira Glazkov's mother was very different. She was elderly and somewhat round-shouldered, her hair was almost white and she shivered in her woollen shawl. I already knew that she had five children of whom Kira was the youngest. Yet there was something in the expression of this weary woman that reminded me forcibly of her eleven-year-old son. As she listened to the discussion, I caught the same eager, almost wondering look on her face I had so often seen on Kira's.

"I know all about you," Gai's mother said laughingly. "The boys come to our place every day and I hear them talking. Sometimes, you know, I get the feeling that I've seen it all myself: I know about the ten films they brought you and how you all went to the Tretyakov Art Gallery. . . ."

"And what a nice wall-newspaper you put out!" interjected Rumyantseva. "Volodya couldn't talk about anything else for days."

"Perhaps you could show us your newspapers? We would be very much interested," Vyruchka asked.

I opened the cupboard and took out two newspapers. Then I showed them the latest issue which had been hung up three days ago beside the blackboard.

The parents read the items with interest, chuckling over the clever cartoons drawn by our class artist Tolya Goryunov. Now and again they would exclaim in surprise and delight as they recognized their sons' style or found their names under some item.

"Well, look at that! I never thought my boy could write poetry!" was Ilyinskaya's astonished remark,

when she saw her Vitya's signature under these verses:

*Look at Borya, our athlete,
He's so nimble on his feet.
Bags the prize in every game,
But goes on training just the same.
Soccer, skiing, running, jumping,
Borya's always doing something.
O'er the benches he can fly,
Like a swallow in the sky.*

Alongside the verse was an excellent likeness of Borya Levin—who really was quite a good gymnast and had latterly taken to jumping over all kinds of obstacles, suitable and unsuitable. These drawings with accompanying texts were very popular among the boys. They sang the verses to the tunes of popular ditties and no one minded if the rhyme limped here and there.

Then I displayed our best copy-books and explained the principle on which the marks were given.

"But look, Vanya has no mistakes and you've given him a 'four'. Why is that?" Vyruchka asked.

"That's for the blot, and for omitting a word," I explained.

"I am glad you are teaching them to be neat," said Kina Glazkov's mother. "My older boys were so untidy when they were at school. It was awful! They always had ink all over their faces and their copy-books were a sight. Kina used to be just the same, but he's improved a lot lately."

"How does Borya behave?" Levina asked, rather anxiously I thought. "I see he likes to jump over benches?"

"He behaves quite well during lessons, but during break he is sometimes impossible," I admitted. "He's always fighting."

"He's the nimble lad, eh? The one who says: 'I hit him back first?'" Goryunov asked and the others laughed.

"Yes. He always begins by hitting back."

"But he seems to be quite popular with the boys just the same," said Gai's mother. "Sasha tells me that Borya always shares his stamps with the others and gives them books to read. Sasha says he's tough, but a good pal."

"Yes, Kira told me about the stamps too," Glazkova added. "My boy is also a great stamp-collector. But I'm afraid neither he nor Borya will ever have a collection like Morozov's. He's been collecting stamps ever since he was six."

I was surprised. "I never knew Morozov collected stamps!"

"Oh yes," said Goryunov. "He has a splendid collection. A great deal of thought and knowledge has gone into it."

"What a reserved child," I thought to myself. "He had never said a word to me about it."

"My Sergei goes in for hunting," said Selivanov. "He wrote an item for the wall-newspaper but he was too shy to hand it in. I thought I'd bring it along to show you." With an awkward smile he handed me a sheet of paper covered with Seryozha's familiar slanting handwriting.

As soon as I got home I took the paper out of my bag and read it.

"Last summer we lived in the village with Grandad. I have no gun of my own, so I asked Dad to lend me his. He said: 'All right, take it. You won't get anything

anyway.' 'Oh yes I will,' I said. And he laughed and said: 'Sure, you'll shoot your own legs.'

"When you go out hunting you get up very early in the morning and start out for the lake. The ducks are swimming about in the water and you sit down and wait.



Whenever they come your way your heart nearly stops beating. 'Now I'm going to shoot,' you think. But before you know it, the ducks are in the air and have flown off to another lake. You get up feeling sad and go to the next lake, but there aren't any ducks there. And there are none at the third lake either. So you just give up and decide to go home. On the way, you stop at the first lake where you were that morning. The ducks are there. You crouch down and hold your breath and wait. Suddenly you see the ducks swimming over to the opposite shore. It makes you very sore. Just as you're getting up to go someone shoots at the ducks, bang-bang! And they come swimming

over to your side. You take aim and fire—bang! You miss. The ducks fly away. It is quite late by the time you get home. The family is having supper. Father says: 'I do like roast duck for supper!' and everybody laughs and your ears burn.

"I remember when I was eight years old I bought a bullfinch for three rubles. I put him in a cage and stood it on top of the stove so that Father shouldn't see it. That evening when Father came home the bullfinch began to sing. Father said: 'What bird have you got there?' And I said: 'No, that must be outside somewhere.' Then the bullfinch sang again. This time I had to own up and take the cage down from its hiding place. But Father didn't scold me. He only laughed and said: 'All right, keep the bird, but see you don't tell any more fibs.'"

I sat over Seryozha's contribution for a long time, reflecting on how little I really knew about people. From what Selivanov had said at the meeting I had judged him to be a harsh, hard-hearted man. But it was quite a different person that emerged from Seryozha's item, not at all like what I had imagined.

* * *

One day after school I was stopped in the corridor by a short, dark man with an intent look in his deep-set eyes.

"Are you Marina Nikolayevna?"

"Yes."

"I am Victor Ilyinsky's father."

"I am very glad to meet you." We shook hands and I invited him into the common-room. We sat down on the couch and I waited for him to speak, wondering what could have brought him to school.

"It's about my Vitya, Marina Nikolayevna," he began,

and paused. Then he went on. "I wanted to ask you how he is behaving himself at school."

"Very well indeed. I have no complaints whatsoever," I replied.

"And how does he get on with his schoolmates?"

"Quite well, I believe. They seem to respect him. You see, he is a Pioneer group leader. He is very good at his lessons, as you can see for yourself from his report card."

"Yes, that I know," said Ilyinsky thoughtfully. "Now here is what I came to you about. It seems to me that Vitya has grown far too conceited of late. He says the class Pioneer leader told him he has unusual organizational ability, and that he has a great deal of initiative. He claims that you told him he is something of a mathematical wizard. Naturally, I am very glad to hear that he has ability. . . . But you see, I am afraid he is getting a swelled head. His classmates will begin to dislike him and his character will be ruined. My wife has been urging me for some time to come and talk to you about it. She says Vitya is getting too big for his boots. Yesterday he was rude to his grandmother and today he refused to go for bread. He said he had a Pioneer rally and that was far more important than doing silly shopping."

I listened in amazement. In school Vitya was always very polite to the teachers and courteous to his classmates. I had never noticed any sign of conceit in him or any desire to boss his comrades. "There you are," I told myself angrily, "you spend all day with them in school, and much of your time at home thinking about them, and yet you know nothing about them. You must visit them at home and see what they are like in their family surroundings, otherwise you will only know one side of them."

A VISIT TO SASHA GAI

Two days after that talk Sasha Gai came up to me during break and said shyly:

"Marina Nikolayevna, our grandad from Tula is visiting us. He's Mummy's father, you know. He says to tell you he would like to meet you and would you please come and visit us."

Sasha said all this in a very low voice, stammering in confusion and glancing up at me apprehensively as if he expected me to take offence or get angry with him.

"Thank your grandad for me and say I shall come and see you tomorrow for sure," I replied.

The next day was Sunday. I ironed my best blouse and Tatyana Ivanovna helped me tie my favourite tie, a blue one with white polka-dots.

Tatyana Ivanovna and Galya were always deeply interested in everything that concerned me. Ever since my brother died and I was left all alone in the world, Galya's grandmother had treated me as one of the family.

During the war I would come home from the institute or from the library to find the tea-pot with a warm cosy on it and a bowl of cereals on the stove. On Sundays they would invite me to dine with them, or else the whole family would come and eat dinner in my room. Tatyana Ivanovna would not bother to wait for an invitation, she would simply come in with the soup tureen and say: "Now then, we're going to have dinner in your room today."

In the same simple, matter-of-fact way she would leave Galya in my care when she had to go out somewhere, and one fine day I came home from the institute

to find my room turned upside down and Tatyana Ivanovna standing on a stool with a paint-brush in her hand critically surveying the wall she had just whitewashed. And all she said when she noticed me standing on the threshold dumbfounded, was: "Don't stand there gaping, my dear. There's some soup in the kitchen, take your things off and have something to eat."

And now she eyed me critically from head to foot and said:

"It's high time you did a little visiting instead of sitting at home all the time with your nose in your books. Galya, run and get Mother's scent-bottle, we'll make her smell nice."

All this fuss and bother about an ordinary visit was a little amusing, I admit, but it was true that I had not gone out visiting for ages. It was pleasant for me to be going to the Gais as a guest instead of on some school business. Pleasant too was the knowledge that Sasha's grandfather from Tula wished to make the acquaintance of Sasha's school-teacher.

Sasha was waiting downstairs at the entrance and he fairly beamed when he saw me. He chattered gaily all the way up to the fourth floor.

"I didn't think you'd come really. But Grandad said of course she'd come if she said she would. And I said: 'But suppose Marina Nikolayevna is busy today?' And he said: 'Once Marina Nikolayevna promised, that means...'" At that point Sasha pressed the button violently and the bell rang out like a fire-alarm.

Sasha's mother opened the door.

"He simply couldn't sit still," she said as she shook hands with me and led the way to a large room. "He ran downstairs to meet you twenty times."

There was a pleasant, homely atmosphere about the room. In the middle stood a large family dining-table covered with a coloured cloth. I caught a brief glimpse of a painting in an old-fashioned frame depicting warriors galloping toward a dark forest on the sort of fiery steeds with long manes and arched necks one finds in fairy-tales. A grey-haired man of spare build rose to meet me.

"This is Ivan Ilyich, my father," said Sasha's mother.

"How do you do," he said cordially, offering me a gnarled hand. "It was very good of you to come, Marina Nikolayevna."

They made me sit down. Ivan Ilyich took a seat opposite me. Sasha stood beside him gazing at me, trying to read by my face whether I liked his grandfather.

"I haven't seen my folks since the summer and so I decided to come and pay them a visit," he said, looking me over. "You are very young, I see. How old are you, if I may ask?"

"Twenty-two," I replied, suddenly conscious that it really was not a great age.

"Twenty-two! And what education have you had?"

"Pedagogical Institute."

"Hm. . . . Twenty-two and graduated from college. When I was twenty-two I had been working at a factory for eleven years. All the learning I had was three years at a parish school," he said thoughtfully. "I am sixty-one now and I've been working at the plant for fifty years. The Tula Ordnance Works, you must have heard of it. Have you ever been to Tula?"

"No, I never have."

"You must come and pay us a visit. Come next summer. We have a nice place there, with a garden. It isn't very big, but you'll find all you want there—gooseberries,

strawberries, red currants, and flowers too. Remember the flowers, Sasha?"

"Oh, Marina Nikolayevna, you ought to see them!" Sasha cried excitedly. "Pansies, and roses, and carnations! And in the middle of the biggest bed of all, there are canna lilies, you know those very, very red ones."

"Sasha and I love to potter about in the garden. We busied ourselves digging and what not all summer long like a pair of moles," Ivan Ilyich laughed.

He had a very youthful smile in spite of his grey whiskers. His bright blue eyes too had a youthful light in them and they looked as if they did not really need glasses.

"What did you do at the works when you were eleven, Ivan Ilyich," I asked him, sounding, no doubt, much like Sasha when he asked me questions in class.

"I began as an errand boy," he replied. "Then I started doing piece-work. I watched what the others did and learned quickly. I got plenty of cuffs in those days. By 1910 I was a full-fledged worker. Now I am assistant chief of a department."

"Grandad hasn't missed a single day at work not counting holidays," Sasha explained proudly. "He's on holiday just now."

"That's true. I don't remember ever having stopped away from the works. The first time that happened was in 1941, when the Germans were just outside Tula on Kosaya Hill. We had shipped off the most valuable equipment to the Urals, and the works was standing idle. It was awful having nowhere to go in the mornings. I didn't know what to do with myself, couldn't put my mind to anything. A terrible time. We felt as if we had lost a dear friend."

He fell silent for a moment, recalling the recent past which already seemed so remote—those first few months of the war. His face grew stern and seemed to have grown thinner suddenly. Deep lines I had not noticed before stood out sharply on his face and I realized that this old man had seen and suffered much.

"And then, when things were hardest, I was called to the works," he went on. "I was out when they came asking for me, and when I got home the wife met me on the doorstep: 'They've sent for you,' she says, 'the director asks you to go to the works.' I went straight there without going inside the house. They didn't ask me for a pass but took me to the director at once. He got up when I came in and shook hands with me. 'We have to get the plant going again, Ivan Ilyich,' he says. 'Thanks for remembering me,' I said. 'I'm ready to start at once.' Well, we went to the shops. It was freezing cold everywhere, the windows were all broken and half of the place was covered with ice. And the machines were all smashed, just so much scrap iron. We started by putting in the window-panes and installing iron stoves. Then we cleared away the ice and began repairing the machines. It's easy to say: restart the works, but how were we going to do it? There were no files, no cutting-tools, not a single lathe that worked—nothing. We dug up all sorts of rusty tools and spare parts from under the snow, hunted up everything we could, and anything that even half looked like a lathe was repaired and hauled to the works on sleds and wheelbarrows, with everybody lending a hand."

"Mother used to tell me how he would come home with his hands all frozen and swollen," Sasha's mother put in softly.

"I wasn't the only one," Ivan Ilyich said. "We all

did our bit. And with everybody pitching in, it was wonderful to see how quickly we got things going again. . . . Before very long everything was repaired and back in place again, so that by the time the Germans were laying siege to the city we were working full force. It was the



same at the plant where my son worked. He is also a gunsmith. We're all gunsmiths in our family."

While Ivan Ilyich was speaking, Olga Ivanovna, Sasha's mother, laid the table and poured out tea. Sasha helped her: he fetched the tea-things, ran to the kitchen and did everything quietly and willingly and without any fuss, just as he did at school. But whenever he happened to be in the room he listened attentively to his grandad's tale, although he had no doubt heard it many a time before.

The door-bell rang. It was Sasha's father. He was a tall, fair-haired man with clipped moustache like his father-in-law's and also touched with grey. He shook hands warmly with me and went off to wash up after work. Presently he joined us. Later on Sasha's elder brother, an eighth-form pupil at our school, came in.

The time passed very pleasantly. I felt quite at ease with these people, as with old friends. I told them a little about myself too, which is something I seldom do. I told them how I had lived with my brother from the age of six, about Anna Ivanovna who had been my teacher up to the seventh form, and about the Pedagogical Institute I had attended during the war, and how in the spring of 1942 I had learned that my brother, the only relative I had in the world, had been killed near Gzhatsk, and how this autumn I had come to teach at Sasha's school.

"It must be hard for you teaching boys?" Ivan Ilyich said, and before I had time to reply he changed the subject; no doubt he felt that this was not a matter to be discussed in Sasha's presence and should be postponed for some more opportune occasion.

"And now we must introduce you to the rest of our family," said Sasha's mother, bringing out the family album.

We spent a long time looking through it. They showed me everybody: the eldest brother, a young Black Sea sailor in a smart sailor's cap and with the same charming boyish smile as Sasha's, and Ivan Ilyich himself in his youth, and another picture of him taken ten years ago with baby Sasha on his lap. (Sasha blushed furiously at the idea of my being shown a picture of himself, a fourth-form schoolboy, as a chubby baby in a frock.)

While I studied all the photographs, some faded with

time, others quite new, they told me all about their relatives and friends. And it seemed to me that I had known these people for a long, long time.

But at last it was time for me to take my leave. Ivan Ilyich and Sasha saw me home. It was a soft winter's evening, and snow-flakes were falling gently. Sasha ran on ahead, sliding over all the frozen puddles.

"He's a good lad," said Sasha's grandfather. "But tell me, isn't it hard for you teaching a class full of boys?"

"It is," I confessed, "very hard sometimes."

"I am not surprised. Take my own work. Every machine has its character, every one of them requires different handling. But you have to deal with human beings, and with boys to boot."

We reached the tram-stop.

"I am very, very glad to have made your acquaintance," Ivan Ilyich said. He pressed my hand warmly, and his kind grave eyes, so young in spite of the web of wrinkles that framed them, looked close into mine.

I returned his warm, friendly handshake, said good-bye to Sasha and boarded the tram with Ivan Ilyich's parting words ringing in my ears, and I felt as if I were setting out on a long and difficult journey instead of merely taking a short tram-ride home.

HEAD OF THE FAMILY

A neighbour answered the door when I rang the bell at the flat where the Ryabinins lived. She showed me the room they occupied and I was about to knock when the sound of Lyosha's voice from within stopped me.

"Nouns such as 'chair' and 'house' belong to the first declension. The second declension includes..."

"Learning his lessons," I thought. I knocked.

"Come in!"

I opened the door and went in. Lyosha gasped with surprise, and I too halted in my tracks. I had expected to find him at his books, but there he was in an apron, with his sleeves rolled up and a wet plate in his hands, staring at me in utter bewilderment.

"So you manage to do your lessons and wash dishes at the same time?" I said with a smile.

"Yes..." Lyosha stammered.

He wiped his hands, pushed forward a chair for me and began untying the apron.

"Hadn't you better finish washing up?" I suggested, and while he complied I took stock of my surroundings.

The room was small and spotlessly clean. Even a girl with the most housewifely instincts could not have done better. In one corner stood a folding cot and a small table with Lyosha's school-books on it. "That's my corner," he explained, and in his usual bright, earnest manner he proceeded to tell me about his home life. His mother worked on the railway; she was a guard on long-distance trains. While she was away he took care of his two small brothers and kept house. He had to take the little ones to kindergarten in the morning, and after school he tidied the room, cooked dinner and brought his little brothers home. They had to be given their supper and put to bed before Lyosha could sit down to do his lessons. When Mother came home, which was once in three days, she did the washing and mending, and then went away again, leaving Lyosha in charge of the household.

Some time later, on my second visit to the Ryabinihs, I met Lyosha's mother, Anisya Matveyevna. She had just returned from one of her two-day trips. I could not help

noticing the respect with which Anisya Matveyevna treated her eldest son. He was her adviser on all domestic matters.

"Shall we buy *valenki* for Fyodor?" she asked Lyosha in my presence.

"There's no need to," he replied. "I had his old ones mended. They're like ~~me~~ v. They'll do him this winter. We could use the money to buy you a warm shawl. You need one badly."

The mother attempted to object, but Lyosha interrupted:

"We'll decide that later on. Marina Nikolayevna isn't interested in such things."

He spoke firmly but not brusquely. His manner was quiet and gentle.

The room was as neat and tidy as on my first visit. The little boys, as chubby and good-natured as two bear cubs, obviously adored their big brother.

He was remarkably self-possessed for a boy of his age, always serious and industrious. Once Sasha Vorobeiko had given him the key of our class-room cupboard, and he had gone to work at once to put things in order. He rolled up his sleeves, wiped all the shelves with a damp cloth, and arranged the books and appliances in such perfect order that you could always lay your hands on whatever you wanted. There was a place for everything. Every day he pinned a sheet of white paper on my desk and when lessons were over he put it away in the cupboard. And whatever task he undertook he executed promptly, willingly and intelligently. I often wondered what he would be when he grew up and I felt sure he would do well at whatever trade he chose. He would

always be calm and dependable and respected by his fellow-workers.

Thinking of Lyosha I realized how fascinating it was to try to picture my boys ten or twenty years later. How would they all turn out? Would they sometimes think of their form school-teacher, I wondered.

FATHER AND SON

Yura Labutin's home-work was always well done. But whenever I asked him to explain how he had solved the problems given he would look blank. Sometimes I called him to the blackboard and gave him another sum to do of exactly the same type as the one he had correctly solved at home, but he would look at me helplessly and say nothing. At first I thought he was shy; I remembered how sensitive he was about his glasses and his weak eyesight.

"But, Yura," I would say, "you did exactly the same sort of sum at home. Look, it is very simple. Can't you really remember how you did it?"

But it was no use. I decided to have a talk with his father and I wrote him a note asking him to come and see me. Labutin senior, however, did not come. Nor did he reply to my note. I telephoned to the factory where he worked but was unable to locate him.

I was surprised and rather annoyed at Labutin's lack of interest in his own son's affairs. But at last he did come to school and he was so sincerely apologetic that I could not but forgive him.

"Marina Nikolayevna, do forgive me, I beg you," he repeated in a deep, rich bass voice, almost operatic in quality. "Inexcusable behaviour on my part, I admit. But

believe me, I have been so busy that I had no time to catch my breath. I usually come home after midnight and leave early. I hardly see Yura. Yes, yes, I know that being busy is no excuse, but I swear I could not come any sooner. . . .”

And in the same swift, heated manner in which Borya Levin talked about football or Kira Glazkov about his beloved stamps, this tall, middle-aged man launched into a long explanation about some device he had designed to simplify electric welding. Unfortunately he had not had a higher education, but he had plenty of practical experience and, before submitting his invention to the factory's engineers, he wanted to work it out in every detail. And that was what had been keeping him at the factory all hours.

“I am sorry to have troubled you, but I simply had to see you,” I told him. “You see, Yura does his arithmetic home-work perfectly but in class he can't solve the simplest problem. What can be the explanation?”

To my surprise Labutin senior turned very red.

“You see,” he stammered, “it's this way. Yura always waits up for me no matter how late I come and asks me to help him with his sums. He says the sum just won't come out. Well, I come home rather tired as you can imagine. ‘Didn't your teacher tell you how to do it?’ I ask him, and he says, ‘Yes she did, but I've forgotten.’ So I just do it for him. . . .”

“And all he has to do is copy it?”

I was shocked. This man, who had just told me how hard he was working to solve a difficult problem and how determined he was to solve it himself, did not hesitate to do his son's thinking for him. It was quite obvious to me that Yura did not even try to do his sums himself,

that he calmly waited for his father to come home and do his home-work for him.

"I am sure that if I were to ask you what traits of character you admired most in people you would say: will power, perseverance, persistence," I said. "You yourself seem to possess those very traits judging by the energy and determination with which you are working on your invention. And here you are bringing up your own son to be a spineless, helpless creature."

"But don't you understand how hard it is for me to refuse him?" he pleaded. "Suppose he really can't grasp the explanation given in class?"

We had a long and rather heated conversation. I had a hard time convincing Labutin that I was right and extracting a promise from him to insist that Yura do his home-work himself.

But although we did argue the point at length there was no bad feeling on either side. Indeed Yura's father and I parted good friends.

After this incident, I recall, I began to visit my pupils' homes regularly. And I must say these visits taught me a great deal. I did not go to lecture the parents and give advice, for I was still far too inexperienced and raw for that. But I felt that from day to day I was adding to my store of experience.

What I learned about the home life of my pupils helped me to understand them much better than before. When I saw by the absent look on Vanya Vyruchka's face that his mind was far away from the lesson I did not rebuke him, because I happened to know that his mother was dangerously ill; or when Lyosha Ryabinin, much to his confusion, came to school with his home-work undone, I waited until the lesson was over before asking him why,

because I knew how many domestic cares this twelve-year-old schoolboy was burdened with.

And the day, or rather the evening, when Lyova Vilenky and I visited Volodya Rumyantsev's home marked a turning point in the life of our whole class.

"DADDY HAS COME HOME!"

Volodya Rumyantsev was a short, sturdily-built little chap with bright brown eyes. I have already told of his friendship with Andrei Morozov, who was the exact opposite of him in every respect. Volodya was good-natured, jolly and warm-hearted. Andrei, on the other hand, was reserved, rather cold in his manner and quite vain. Volodya was devoted to him. He took everything that concerned Andrei deeply to heart and he never said "I", but always "Andryusha and I". Morozov did his best to reciprocate, but he did not succeed. He was not a very good comrade. He and Volodya came to school together and left together, but Andrei was never particularly pleased when Volodya made a good showing, nor did he care when Volodya got a low mark, as he did occasionally. On the other hand, if Andrei got anything less than a "five", sympathy would be written all over Volodya's round rosy face.

Volodya lived with his mother and grandmother. He was always talking about his father, citing his views on all and every occasion: "Now my Daddy says..." One might have thought that Volodya saw his father every day and had never been parted from him. As a matter of fact, Volodya's father, an army officer, had been away from home for four years. He wrote very often, however, and now he was on his way home. He was expected any

day and Volodya was full of excited plans as to what he was going to do "when Daddy comes home".

Shortly before the winter vacations Volodya fell sick. His absence made itself felt, although he was neither a class monitor nor a Pioneer leader. It was just that we missed his gay presence. He lived not far from my house and I decided to drop in to see him on my way home. Lyova offered to join me.

We were somewhat surprised when Volodya himself answered our ring. He had a gumboil and his swollen cheek was tied with a grey woollen scarf, the loose ends of which stuck out comically on top of his head, making him look rather like a sad little bunny rabbit. He beamed at the sight of us and actually hopped with joy.

"Oh, how wonderful of you to come!" he said, his gumboil giving him a slight lisp. "Take off your hats and coats and come inside."

Hardly had we removed our coats than there was a long and insistent ring at the door. Volodya looked wonderingly first at us and then at the door.

"Now who could that be?"

Lyova who was standing nearest the door opened it. On the threshold stood a tall man in army uniform carrying a suit-case. Volodya stood rooted to the spot. He could not believe his eyes. The new-comer also stood silently gazing at the boy, evidently gripped by some deep emotion.

The door of one of the rooms in the passage opened and a tall grey-haired woman appeared.

"Vasya..." she whispered.

Whereupon Volodya began to behave most queerly. He rushed over to us, then to the man, and then back to me again.

"Marina Nikolayevna! Granny! It's Daddy! Daddy's come home!" He yelled wildly and there was a catch in his voice.

The father turned to him, embraced and kissed him, but the boy continued to rush about wildly. The joy and excitement was too much for him. He rushed to his grandmother, from his grandmother to the telephone to call up his mother and tell her the glad news, and back again to us. "Sit down Lyova, Marina Nikolayevna! Granny, Granny, how can you sit still?"

His grandmother was so overcome that she could only sit there and cling to her son's hands as though fearing that he might break away and leave her again. Rumyantsev stood beside her, still in his overcoat and with a look of unutterable joy on his face.

"We must be going . . . excuse us . . ." Lyova repeated for at least the tenth time.

Rumyantsev appeared not to have been aware of our presence until that moment.

"I am Volodya's teacher," I said in response to his unspoken question.

"And I'm the Pioneer leader," Lyova hastened to add.

Rumyantsev turned to us quickly and there was a note of anxiety in his voice as he asked: "You haven't come to complain about Volodya, I hope?"

We both laughed.

"Oh no," Lyova reassured him. "We just dropped in to see how he was." And again he repeated: "You must excuse us."

"On the contrary, it is we who must be excused," said Rumyantsev. "But you must promise to come another time, will you? And I too shall come and see you. I'll come to the school and you must introduce me to Volo-

dya's classmates. He has told me so much about his school in his letters that I am impatient to have a look for myself. May I?"

"Of course!"

We took our leave and went out.

Lyova was thoughtful as we walked down the stairs. His shoulders drooped and he looked suddenly very tired. On one of the landings he stumbled and paused to adjust his glasses.

"You can't imagine how many times I have tried to picture what it would be like when my father came home," he said in a voice that was far from steady. "I'm sure I would have behaved just like Volodya. I wouldn't have known what to do with myself from joy. Did you see how crazy he was?"

I said nothing.

"My father was killed near Smolensk in 1942," Lyova said in a barely audible voice.

PIONEER RALLY

Volodya's father, Vasili Dmitrievich Rumyantsev, kept his promise. He attended a Pioneer rally in our class.

The boys gazed admiringly at this tall, well-built man, with the fine open countenance and the military decorations on his tunic. Volodya had told us so much about his father that we all regarded him as an old friend.

Vasili Dmitrievich did not sit at my desk as was customary for a visitor who came to address the class. Instead, he walked over to the middle of the room and sat down at the desk beside Lyosha Ryabinin.

"Well, my friends," he said, addressing all of us, "what would you like me to tell you?"

For a moment there was silence as the class considered this question. Then Vanya Vyruchka spoke up from the far corner of the class-room:

"Tell us about your decorations, what you got them for!"

A loud hum of approval greeted this suggestion. Vasili Dmitrievich looked thoughtfully at the boys, then got up and took a turn about the room and sat down again beside Lyosha.

"I know that to you boys a decoration stands for some extraordinary feat of valour," he began. "But I am afraid I will have to disappoint you. Take this decoration. It was given me for the crossing of the Dnieper. Now, if I didn't happen to be a good swimmer, if I hadn't kept myself physically fit ever since I was your age I would probably have been drowned. Don't forget we had to swim under enemy fire, and with all our clothes on and our rifles besides. So you see there really isn't much of a story behind this decoration. I got the other Red Banner for leading my company out of encirclement . . . But after all why should I get all the credit for that? No, friends, everything depended on the men who were with me and who endured all the hardships and dangers with such courage. And why were they able to endure it? No doubt you think they must have been very strong and tough, giants of a sort. True, a soldier has to be strong and healthy, he must be able to stand a great deal, but even that is not everything. . . ."

Vasili Dmitrievich paused as if remembering something.

"I shall tell you about our medical orderly, Natasha Ilyina. She was a very young girl, she had just finished school when she took a course for war nurses and was

sent straight to the front-line. I remember how at first she used to shut her eyes and tremble when she heard the bullets whistling. I wondered how she would behave in battle. I saw that she was troubled by the same thought and I felt that she was anxious to put herself to the test as quickly as possible. She asked to be sent on an assignment with the scouts, but she was told to wait. But very soon after that she was plunged right into the thick of the fighting. It happened so quickly that she had no time to prepare for it. For three days and nights in succession she worked, bandaging the wounded on the battle-field and carrying them to safety. And not once did anyone of us hear her complain that she was tired, although there was no one to relieve her all those three days and nights.

"After that Natasha was sent out with a scout party. When they reached the enemy lines the commander was wounded. He lost consciousness. Natasha lay down in the snow beside him and pretended to be dead. German soldiers walked past her as she lay there, and one of them kicked her in the face. But she did not cry out or open her eyes. When darkness came she carried the commander over to our side. She crawled with him for nearly five kilometres in the snow, with nothing to eat, and almost without rest. Her frozen hands were scratched and bleeding but she did not stop until she reached our lines.

"When they were about half-way across, the wounded commander regained consciousness and begged her to leave him and get away herself while there was still time. 'You'll never have the strength to drag me all the way in any case,' he said. But she pretended not to have heard him. Well, what would you say it was that helped Natasha to do what she did?"

"She must have gone in for sports a lot," Selivanov ventured after a brief pause.

"She was a sturdily built girl, that's true. But people much stronger than she was might not have been able to do what she did," Captain Rumyantsev said.

"She had a strong character," said Sasha Vorobeiko. Rumyantsev threw a quick glance at him.

"Yes, you are right. She had a strong character, lots of will power. And that is very important. Long ago when I was still a boy I remember reading the letters of Felix Dzerzhinsky. I shall never forget them! In 1914 Dzerzhinsky was in prison. It was cold and miserable there, there was nothing to eat and he was all alone. His fellow-prisoners were dying off from consumption and typhus. Dzerzhinsky was a sick man himself and he didn't think he would survive. But listen to the letter he wrote to his parents" (Rumyantsev took a note-book out of his pocket and ran through it rapidly). "'I want to come back and I *will* come back in spite of everything, because my physical condition here depends almost exclusively on my will.' Now you might wonder how a man's will can overcome illness? But he told himself that he simply must survive. The people needed him, and he must fight to the end. And he didn't perish, in spite of cold, hunger and disease. When I read that I realized that there is something that is stronger even than physical strength, and that is strength of spirit. Our men at the front were strong in spirit and that is why they endured everything. That is why a slip of a girl like Natasha was able to do what seemed to be far beyond her strength. She was a Komsomol member, and so she was fighting for the finest and noblest idea in the world. And those who fight for that idea and are confident of victory are the best, the

strongest, the most invincible soldiers in the world.... Do you want to say something?" Vasili Dmitrievich broke off as Gai raised his hand.

"I... I," Sasha got up. "I wanted to ask this. Suppose you haven't got a strong will, what then?"

"Do you think a man is born with a strong will? No, my friend, will power is something that has to be developed."

"How do you do it?" several voices piped up.

"How? You begin with small things, with the most ordinary, everyday things. Now, discipline...."

"Oh, discipline," Sasha Vorobeiko said with such a rueful expression that Rumyantsev must have understood at once that this was a sore point with Sasha.

"Yes, you've heard that one before, haven't you, sonny?" he said. He got up and walked down the row of desks and stopped in front of Sasha. "Now let's say you wake up in the morning and prepare to go to school. It is still dark, because it's winter, but the electricity works, and there's water on tap and gas in the kitchen. The municipal workers have seen to it that the city is kept constantly supplied with water, gas and electricity. You go out. A tram-car clatters past you, trolley-buses roll by taking people to work. In the underground a train pulls in every three minutes. The shops are open. Everybody is at work, everybody is busy."

The boys listened in some surprise at this digression.

"You are so accustomed to all this that you take it for granted. But suppose you stop and think a little about all those people who are working for you. You will see that this is possible only because there is common agreement among people, in other words, discipline. And

discipline means this—if you are a member of a community you must learn to submit to the rules of the community. Without this the whole structure of our life would fall apart, everything would go wrong. You may say all this is very simple and clear to everybody. Why should I speak of it? Let me tell you why. Each one of you understands how necessary discipline is in factories and in the army. But what about your own class, what about school? Discipline takes any number of forms. It means not coming late for school, not talking during lessons, it means doing your home-work properly, in short, sticking to the rules established for all. How can all this make a good worker or a brave soldier, you may say. After all, my school duties are so trivial compared with what I shall be doing when I grow up. Isn't that what you're thinking? But don't you realize that it is every bit as important to develop your will power from childhood as it is to develop your muscles? Do you imagine that a strong will comes of itself? Oh no, it doesn't. You all know that your education depends not only on your teachers and your parents, but on yourselves. Read the life-stories of great men and you will see that from an early age they trained in themselves the very qualities for which we now admire them. That is terribly important. The front was hardest of all on those who were not accustomed to discipline before the war. And what I want you to understand is this: a decoration on a soldier's chest does not always mean that he has done something spectacularly heroic, but you can be sure that he would not have got it if he didn't have a strong will, grit, the ability to overcome difficulties, even those that seem beyond human strength."

I was sitting beside Kolya Savenkov, and I could not help feeling that it might be painful for this lad, whose own father would never come home, to see his class-mate's father returned safe and sound. But Kolya was gazing at Rumyantsev with the same rapt attention as the others, and no shade of bitterness marred the look of breathless interest with which he hung on the captain's every word.

When Rumyantsev had finished the boys crowded round him. Kolya squeezed himself to the front and caught hold of his sleeve and held it while others poured questions thick and fast. And I noticed that Vasili Dmitrievich stroked the lad's bristly, close-cropped head once or twice, as if he understood.

On my way home that afternoon I reflected that although I had read so many stories to the class about our heroes at the front I had never seen my boys react as they had that day. Of course the account of an eye-witness was bound to make a stronger impression than anything else. But I felt Rumyantsev had done something more for the boys: he had shown them that heroism was not an exalted, abstract conception but something tangible and within their grasp.

ZOYA'S TEACHER

Once during break Lyova came to me looking much excited.

"Marina Nikolayevna," he said, "I have found out something terribly important. I know the address of the teacher who taught Zoya Kosmodemyanskaya when she was in the fourth form. Zoya was eleven years old then, the same age as our boys. Don't you think we ought to go

and see her? Perhaps she would agree to come and talk to our boys. I am sure she could tell us some very interesting things, something like the talk Rumyantsev gave us. What do you say?"

"We shall go together," I said

Lyova was delighted. That evidently was exactly what he had wanted.

That evening he and I went to see Lidia Nikolayevna Yuryeva.

She lived on the outskirts of the town and her house was not easy to find. We wandered for a long time among rows of little houses all looking exactly alike. I kept floundering in snow-drifts until I was so weary that I suggested putting off our visit until the following Sunday.

"It will be easier to find the house in the day-time," I said.

But just then Lyova gave a triumphant cry: "There it is, Number 7!"

Two minutes later we were in a tiny room, so small that there was barely room for the two beds and a desk that literally sagged under the weight of the copy-books piled on it. On the wall over the desk I noticed the portrait of a young man of about 17 with a handsome, open face.

Lidia Nikolayevna introduced us to her father, an old man with a head of snow-white hair and a long white beard.

"And this is my nephew," she said, pointing to a chubby-faced youngster of about four who was staring at us with undisguised curiosity.

For some reason—perhaps because of our long and wearisome search for the house, or because of the somewhat austere atmosphere in this little room—Lyova and

I both felt rather awkward and shy, and in our confusion we gave a somewhat incoherent explanation for our visit. Lidia Nikolayevna, a small frail woman, studied our faces as she listened. When we finished she was silent for a while.

"It will be very hard for me..." she said at last. "I don't think I can bear to talk about it. Zoya's death and the death of my own son ... are so closely interlinked for me ... and so painful. I am afraid nothing will come of it."

Lyova turned pale and half rose.

"You must excuse us," he said in a low voice. "In that case, of course, you mustn't... We did not know..."

"Wait," Lidia Nikolayevna waved him back into his seat.

We sat quiet for what seemed to me a very long time.

"You ought to go," said the old man, addressing his daughter. "I think you ought to go."

"I understand," his daughter replied. She seemed to have forgotten our existence. "I understand," she repeated, "because I am a teacher too. But I am afraid I shall make a mess of it."

"No, you won't," the old man urged. "Tell them about the girl and about Volodya too ... and it will be all right."

Lidia Nikolayevna rose and hurried out of the room.

"She cannot get over it," said the father, looking at Lyova's distressed face. "It happened long ago but the wound has not healed. My grandson was killed too, he went to fight at Zoya's call." He glanced up at the photograph. "After it happened I came here to stay with her and brought my youngest grandson with me

to cheer her up a bit. We're rather crowded, but it is better than if she were alone. . . ."

Lidia Nikolayevna came back into the room carrying a folder. Moving aside a heap of copy-books, she laid the folder on the desk, opened it up and took out a large group photograph.

"Here is a photo of our fourth form. See, there's Zoya. And that is her brother, Shura. And here is Zoya's copy-book. Notice how neat it is, not a single blot. This is my Volodya's copy-book. . . . Not nearly so neat, as you can see. . . ." She smiled through her tears.

She showed us everything in the folder: the copy-books filled with the handwriting of Zoya and Shura Kosmodemyansky and Volodya Yuryev, their drawings and photographs. When we took our leave she said:

"Saturday then, at seven. Don't worry, I shall come. I know that I must."

Lyova and I left the little house and walked for a time in silence.

"Lyova," I said uncertainly after a while, "I wonder whether we did right in coming? Perhaps we ought not to have asked her?"

"The old man said she should," Lyova replied firmly. "And he understands."

I could not but agree with him.

HEROES IN OUR MIDST

Lidia Nikolayevna came as she had promised, promptly at seven o'clock. Her hair was combed back severely from her forehead and she wore a simple dark suit with a small white collar. But it was the change in her face that struck Lyova and myself most forcibly. The strained

unhappy look that had chilled us both when we first saw her was gone, and her expression was warm and gentle. Now, as she surveyed the class, her face lit up and she sat down calmly at the table and began talking as simply and naturally as if she had spent half her life at this very desk talking to our boys.

"Eleven years ago, on September 1, 1935," she began, "I started teaching in the fourth form. Besides teaching Russian, I was to be the class mistress, like Marina Nikolayevna. At the beginning of the lessons a little dark-haired girl came up to me and said:

"Lidia Nikolayevna, will you please permit my brother to sit next to me? He will attend much better if I am beside him."

"Her brother was standing with a group of other boys chattering excitedly. When I told him to go and sit next to his sister he scowled and looked at the other boys, the way any of you would, I daresay. After all, you do look down on girls, don't you?

"I sat some of the other boys next to the girls so that he should not feel so conspicuous. And in the meantime I looked at the brother and sister noticing how very different they were.

"That was Zoya and Shura Kosmodemyansky. Zoya was a very serious girl and very attentive in class. Shura, on the other hand, was lively and fidgety. But although they were so different in character they were very good friends. They came to school together and left together, and were always talking and laughing together. Sometimes during lessons Shura would produce a bit of paper and begin fiddling with it, paying no attention to the lesson. But soon Zoya would lay her hand silently on the paper and a little frown would appear on her forehead—

she was afraid she might miss something—and Shura would give up his bit of paper without protest.

"Zoya often stayed on after lessons to help her classmates do their sums or to explain some difficult rule of grammar.

"Lyubov Timofeyevna, her mother, came to me once and asked me not to keep the girl after school. I promised. But Zoya was quite upset when I reminded her the next day to go straight home after lessons. And she said: 'I thought it over all night and I decided that I was right. I have spoken to Mother about it and she has allowed me to stay on and help the other classmates.'

"This impressed me very much. Here was a girl of barely twelve with such a strong sense of justice that she was able to win an adult over to her point of view not by stubbornness but by a deep conviction that she was right.

"I once happened to mention—I don't remember how it came up—that I had no 'favourites' among my pupils. Everybody agreed that this was so. Presently, however, one of the boys, Borya was his name, said:

" 'Lidia Nikolayevna, you say you have no favourites, but you like Zoya Kosmodemyanskaya very much, don't you?'

"For a moment I really did not know what to say, but then I decided that a straight question deserved a straight answer.

" 'Of course I do,' I said. 'You like her too, don't you? Didn't she help you do your sums?'

" 'She did,' Borya admitted.

" 'She helped you too, didn't she?' I asked one of the others.

" 'Yes.'

" 'And you? And you?'

"My children looked at one another. They realized that Zoya had done each one of them a good turn.

"The next winter Zoya and Shura were transferred to another form. They grew up, advancing from form to form, and of course they changed. At your age three or four years makes a big difference. But basically they remained the same. And when I heard Zoya's teachers talking about her at the age of 15 and 17 I recognized the little Zoya I had taught in the fourth. She was as modest and diligent as she had always been. She and her brother were still good friends and he obeyed her as before, and not simply because she was older than him, but because he loved her and respected her. And one very important trait in Zoya's character became more and more clearly defined. Now, how can I explain it exactly to you?"

Lidia Nikolayevna paused for a few moments.

Then, suddenly addressing herself to Tolya Goryunov sitting in the front row, she said: "Now tell me, do you think it is right to prompt a classmate?"

"Prompting? During lessons? Oh no," replied Tolya, blushing to the roots of his hair at the unexpectedness of the question.

"But suppose one of your classmates asked you to help him by whispering the answer to him in class. Would you do it?"

For a moment Tolya hesitated. He glanced at me and, growing redder still, he admitted with a sigh: "I suppose I would."

"But look, you say yourself it isn't the right thing to do. Why would you do it then?"

"Because he couldn't let his friend down!" Borya Levin chimed in.

"Ah, that's just it! You know you are doing wrong

but you are afraid to offend your chum. Now Zoya was never afraid to stick to her principles. Let me tell you about something that happened in our class. Once, during dictation, one of the girls asked Zoya how to spell a word. Zoya refused to tell her. The girl was highly indignant. Zoya's conduct was discussed at a class meeting and many of the children were of the opinion that she had been guilty of an uncomradely action. Zoya however stuck to her guns: she was always ready to help anyone in a difficulty, she said, but to prompt a classmate during a test was something she would never do because she considered it dishonest.

"Now it takes real strength of character to adhere so firmly to one's principles. No one likes to be considered uncomradely. You and I know very well that many of you believe prompting is necessary, and that not to prompt a comrade means to let him down badly. That's true now, isn't it?

"Zoya never refused to help anyone who was really in need of her assistance. But she was not afraid to tell some capable but lazy classmate to his face: 'You must do your lessons yourself. It isn't difficult if you use your head a little.'

"Did she risk losing her classmates' friendship by this attitude? She did. But she was not afraid of that. She did not want friendship purchased by indulgence. She was a high-principled young person, if you know what that means. She had principles and she was not afraid to live up to them.

"The others came to understand this, and to respect her for it, because they saw that she was demanding of others no more than what she demanded of herself. And this was true of big things as well as small.

"During the first autumn of the war, I remember, the senior pupils went out to the country to help bring in the potato crop. It was very hard work. It rained day after day and the ground became so soggy that shoes and galoshes stuck in the mud, making it impossible to move about. One evening when the others were already in bed, Zoya got some tape and made laces to keep the galoshes from falling off. In the morning everyone was able to go to work. Another time, when the weather was particularly nasty and all the others stayed home, Zoya went out alone and worked by herself in spite of the rain and mud.

"Why am I telling you all this? Because I want you to understand that what we all admire so much in Zoya—her straightforwardness, her staunchness and courage—were qualities she had trained in herself from childhood.

"One day she asked me this question: 'Lidia Nikolayevna, we know it is wrong to tell lies. But suppose you were caught by the enemy. What then? You couldn't tell the truth in that case, could you?'

"I told her that it was our duty to conceal the truth from our country's enemies. Zoya listened in silence. Then she said: 'Yes, you could say: "I shall not tell, I cannot tell."'

"That was in 1935. And on January 27, 1942, I read in *Pravda* how Zoya had answered the Germans during her interrogation: 'No, I shall not tell!' She had remained true to what she had believed in from childhood...."

Lidia Nikolayevna fell silent again. I looked at my boys: they were gazing intently at Zoya's teacher, waiting for her to continue.

"When Zoya perished, six boys from our school, all my pupils, went to the Soviet Army as volunteers," Lidia Nikolayevna continued. Her voice was as calm and

gentle as before, but I noticed that her hands which had lain quietly on the table were now tightly clenched.

"One of them was Zoya's brother Shura Kosmodemyansky. He and his comrades broke into the positions of the German division whose soldiers and officers had tortured Zoya to death, and he avenged his sister. Among those boys was my own son Volodya. He finished a school for tankists at the age of 17 and became a tank commander with the rank of lieutenant. He fought the enemy bravely and was decorated three times with the Order of the Patriotic War. Like Shura, he was killed just before victory."

A faint rustle swept over the class-room as if all the forty boys had sighed at once. But Lidia Nikolayevna did not pause. She unlocked her fingers and took a photograph out of an envelope lying on the table.

"Come over here," she said, "and I will show you all three of them, Zoya, Shura and Volodya...."

And to my surprise, instead of rushing noisily from their seats, pushing and jostling one another as they usually did, my boys got up quietly and came over to the desk and examined in turn the photographs, drawings and copy-books Lidia Nikolayevna had shown Lyova and myself during our visit to her home.

I do not know how to describe the feeling that talk evoked in me. I think perhaps it might be summed up as follows: There are heroes all around us. Look at your comrades, at those who live and study beside you, and you will realize that the seeds being planted in them now will in later life bear fruit—each one of them can be a hero, you too can be a hero. Are you honest, just, firm? That is the sort of person you will be when you grow up. You have told a lie? You cannot discipline yourself, you

don't do your lessons, you are lazy? Take care, ponder over this now, for later on it will be much harder to overcome these weaknesses, to get rid of a bad habit once it has taken root. You must wait until you are fourteen before you can be a Komsomol member? Yes, but don't forget that you can begin now to develop the qualities that go to make a Communist or a Komsomol.

After Lidia Nikolayevna's talk the boys got the idea of arranging an exhibition telling about our own school's ex-pupils who had served in the army. Lyova supported the proposal and the boys proceeded with great enthusiasm to put it into effect. They interviewed the young men's former teachers, and actually managed to locate some of them who happened to be in town. They dug up information about those who had been killed by contacting men who had fought in the same unit. Without any prompting from either Lyova or myself, they probed to the very core of things. They were not concerned with externals. What interested them was the character, the moral make-up of the soldier and how that character had been formed, in other words how these young men, who had only recently sat in the very same class-room and at the very same desks as themselves, had become staunch, courageous fighting men.

Here is what Vanya Vyruchka wrote under one of the portraits of our exhibition:

"Yuri Antonov attended our school. He finished it just before the war and then he went to the front. Yuri was a paratrooper. He endured all the hardships and dangers of the service with great courage. He swam across rivers, and spent hours on end in icy water. He suffered severe heat and extreme cold. Once he had nothing to eat for ten days.

"He was able to do all this because he had hardened himself from childhood. He and his brother used to go on long hiking tours. They always agreed beforehand never to complain about anything. If a storm came up while they were on the road, they did not stop to take cover but went on. When they were only five years old they learned to skate and ski. At the age of 10 they could ride a full-sized bicycle and at 15 they learned to drive a car. They were both very fit and so the hardships of front-line life did not frighten them. Yuri's elder brother did not attend our school, but he was a hero too.

"Yuri Antonov was a good comrade and always helped anyone in difficulty. He carried his wounded com-mander to safety from the battle-field.

"Natalya Andreyevna, who taught Yuri Antonov from the first to the fourth form, says that he was always a good comrade who thought first of others and then of himself.

"Now he is in the Far East. When he returns to Moscow he is sure to come to school and tell us all about his experiences."

When I read what Vanya had written I felt that however painful it might have been for her, Lidia Nikolayevna had done well to come to our class and talk to the boys about her Volodya and about Zoya and Shura Kosmodemyansky.

AN OLD FRIEND

That day I had gone straight from school to the Lenin Library. Ever since my student-days I have loved the hushed atmosphere that reigns in its spacious, high-ceilinged reading-room filled with people engrossed in

their work; the soft light pouring down on the pages of open books; pencils poised over note-books as thoughts crystallize into ideas, and pens moving swiftly over paper, threading line upon line. I love to pause in my own work for a moment or two to study the faces around me: most of them young, with brows slightly knit, eyes eager and alert, lips tightly compressed and sometimes parting a little in a fleeting smile of triumph (aha, so my guess was right!) or of amazement (wonderful! I never believed it possible!).

Next to me that afternoon sat a girl of about eighteen, her chin resting in her hands, totally immersed in her reading. Now and again she sighed. I wanted to glance at the book she was reading, but her elbow was in the way. After a while I forgot her and lost myself in Korolenko's *The Story of My Contemporary*. Presently my neighbour closed the book sharply and leaned back in her chair. I looked up and our eyes met.

"Gorky's *Tales of Italy*," she said, smiling in answer to my unspoken question. "I have never read it before!"

I had guessed as much from the rapt look on her face.

It was Anna Ivanovna who had introduced me to those delightful stories of Gorky's and to many other books I have come to love. And now, as sometimes happens, my memory snatched at this straw and brought my school-days and my childhood companions and friends vividly back to mind.

As I walked home through the quiet wintry streets I thought of these childhood friends and how long it had been since I had seen any of them. All my time, all my thoughts were now given wholly to my work; so much so indeed that on meeting some acquaintance I could talk of nothing else, and even when I was alone, school

occupied my thoughts to the exclusion of all else. But now on my way home from the reading-room I suddenly realized that subconsciously I had always been thinking of those who had been near and dear to me. My old school too I remembered as vividly as if I had just crossed its threshold for the last time; and Anna Ivanovna, and my classmates, especially Shura Cheremshansky, that restless lad who had been my best friend in those years. It was nearly a year since I had heard anything of him.

Galya opened the door for me.

"Marina Nikolayevna," she greeted me breathlessly, "there's someone waiting for you. I told him you must be at school and I offered to take him to you, but he said he'd better wait or else you might miss each other."

Excited curiosity was written all over Galya's face. She loved new people. She knew all my friends, but this one was evidently a stranger to her and she was dying to know who he was.

"He says he knew me when I was very little, but I wouldn't remember him," she chattered on. "Granny invited him into our room to wait for you."

The door of Galya's room opened and there on the threshold stood...

"Shura Cheremshansky?" I faltered.

"Shura Cheremshansky it is!" he replied with a broad grin.

I seized his hand and dragged him to my room. In my excitement I could not fit the key into the lock and Shura had to do it for me.

"Oh Shura, where have you been all this time? Why didn't you write? I was just this minute thinking about you and here you are!"

At first our conversation was rather incoherent for we kept interrupting one another. After a while I realized that we were still standing and I made him sit down in my only arm-chair.

"Now tell me everything, from the very beginning," I urged.

Shura and I had been classmates from the third form to the tenth. In the third and fourth forms we had squabbled and fought in the manner of boys and girls, but from the fifth on we had been good friends. Shura had been a very capable boy. Literature and mathematics, chemistry and history, music and drawing all came equally easy to him. From year to year his report card recorded his ability for both science and literature. Anna Ivanovna always said that she was a little afraid of such versatility; she believed that one ought to concentrate on one thing. Otherwise, she said, there was a danger of becoming a dilettante. But in the eighth form Shura announced that he was going to be a teacher and he kept his word. Many people thought he was making a mistake. "Why should a talented youngster like you go in for teaching," they said. "Surely with your ability you could do better than that. Why, you could be a professor, or an actor, anything in fact." But Shura did not agree. "A teacher must have talent and ability too."

I believe that he too, like myself, had been prompted in the choice of a profession by his love and respect for Anna Ivanovna.

"Sometimes I get very discouraged," he used to confess to me. "It seems to me that I'm no good and never will be. Whenever I feel like that I go to Anna Ivanovna and sit and talk to her for a while, and I come away feeling that everything is going to be fine. It does you good

to be with her. She has a way of clearing up things for you and making you feel confident in yourself. Now that is a quality we might all envy."

Perhaps Shura appreciated that quality particularly because it was one he himself lacked. He was not especially popular in school. Many of his classmates resented his sharp tongue and his dry humour, so unlike the gentle humour of Anna Ivanovna. But Anna Ivanovna would say: "Shura is like a tortoise, hard outside, but soft inside." And that was true. With those he counted as his friends Shura could be extremely warm-hearted and gentle.

We finished school on the eve of the war. I went with my brother to Leningrad and Shura was planning to go on a hiking tour in the Caucasus. When we returned to Moscow he was gone, not to the Caucasus, but to an artillery school somewhere, and six months later he was at the front. He wrote to Anna Ivanovna and to myself and a few other classmates, but gradually his letters became rarer and briefer and latterly had ceased altogether. All we knew was that he was alive and was somewhere in the Ukraine. And now he was here in my room, drumming his fingers on the arm of the chair—an old habit of his. Outwardly he had not changed: the same fair hair curling over the prominent forehead, the same faintly amused expression in his grey deep-set eyes under their thick dark eyebrows, and the same mocking smile lurking in the corner of his firm small mouth. Nevertheless I felt that this was not the Shura of my school-days.

He was very reticent about himself. What had he been doing? There was the army. His unit had been surrounded by the enemy near Kiev, he had served for a year and a half with the partisans in the Ukraine; he had been wounded and spent some time in hospital and had re-

turned to the front again. He could not or would not go into details.

I was very glad to see him. With him I could talk freely about my brother, for Shura had been very fond of him. So many pleasant memories were associated with him!

"How strange it is!" I repeated. "All the way home I was thinking of you, and here you are!"

"I have pictured all this so often that it isn't strange to me at all!"

"But why didn't you write?"

"Because I wanted to see you too much!"

"That's an absurd excuse!"

"I know. But, believe me, I wanted to see you so badly I simply couldn't write. I tried, but nothing came of it."

"But I would have understood. After all we've known each other for so long. And whenever I meet anyone of the old crowd the first question is about you. Anna Ivanovna too. She is always asking me to write to her about you. But how could I when I didn't know anything myself?"

"You see, I have been hoping for a long time to come to Moscow. I had to see all of you and talk to you. But I couldn't write. You must believe me. Tatyana Ivanovna has told me all about you. She says you never see anyone, you don't go anywhere except to school. She was quite indignant about it. She tells me those boys of yours don't leave you any time for yourself. Is that true?"

"I'm afraid it is. But you know yourself what a handful fourth-form schoolboys can be."

"I envy you, Marina!" Shura rose and took a turn about the room, then sat down on the arm of the chair. "If you only knew how I envy you! I'd give anything to get back to teaching. Now more than ever before."

By the tremor in his voice, by the way his face lit up, banishing all trace of the customary quizzical expression, I saw how deeply moved he was.

"I was terribly upset at first when they gave me the fourth form," I said. "I actually thought it demeaning for a college graduate to teach elementary school. But now I am glad. It is good to start with the fourth form."

"Of course it is. But in my opinion it would be better still to begin with the first form, and take them all the way to the tenth. Then you would really have every right to call them your pupils!"

"Author's pride, eh?" I laughed.

"You may laugh, but if you and I could be authors like Anna Ivanovna, then perhaps our 'tomes' would be as worth while as hers. And after all she did not always have easy material to work with—I am referring to pupils like myself for instance. . . . I shall come and sit in at one of your lessons tomorrow, if I may."

"Oh, don't do that. It's bad enough having the head mistress or the head of curricula or the inspectors sitting in at my lessons. But you or Anna Ivanovna. . . . Oh no, I couldn't. . . . I would feel awful having someone I know watching me teach."

"Now, don't be silly. To be in Moscow and not to pay a visit to your school would be a crime. I'd let you sit in at my lesson, honest I would. And I shall, you'll see!"

"So you haven't changed your mind about teaching?"

"Changed my mind? Why, I can think of nothing else. I am already taking a correspondence course in mathematics."

"What institute?"

"The Kiev Pedagogical."

"So you haven't come to stay?"

"No, I'm going back to the Ukraine. I have been asked to take a job as correspondent of *Komsomolskaya Pravda* from the Stalino Region. It sounds interesting, but I'm afraid I shan't be able to cope with it. Apart from my school compositions and letters I haven't done any writing. You know that. But I daresay I can work and learn. I've been doing some work latterly for the Regional Committee of the Party inspecting schools. I've spent a lot of time with pupils and teachers and I'm terribly anxious to go to a school not as an outsider but as a teacher in my own right. I think there's nothing more fascinating than to teach."

He got up again and began pacing the room.

"You ought to see what is going on down there! Nearly all the schools were destroyed. And even those that survived had nothing but the bare walls. No books, no equipment, nothing. In many places the pupils repaired the schools themselves, did the plastering, painting, built stoves, all by themselves. Wonderful kids! A curious thing happened in one village. The youngsters there repaired their school building and lessons started again. But they weren't satisfied. You see, before the war theirs had been a model school, the pride of the whole district. It had all kinds of study-rooms, first-class equipment and a substantial library. And now they had nothing. But it was the books they missed most. And at that time every printed page was worth its weight in gold. One day a parcel arrived addressed to the school. They opened it and what do you think was in it—books! And what books—one-volume editions of Gogol, Chekhov, Belinsky, Dobrolyubov, Sholokhov's *And Quiet Flows the Don*, Fadeyev's *The Young Guard*, a good twenty books and just the ones they needed most.

"The postmark on the wrapping showed the parcel came from Moscow. But who had sent it? Nobody knew. A couple of months later, another parcel arrived, and again it contained all the latest books put out in Moscow. That went on all the year. The children were simply wild with joy. You can't imagine how they treasured those books, and they were naturally very curious to know who had sent them. Quite recently the mystery was cleared up. It appears that one of the school's former pupils had gone to Moscow to live with relatives and had told her people all about the children who had restored their school and how badly they needed books. And so the girl's uncle, who was an engineer and a great book-lover himself with a splendid library of his own, got the idea of sending those parcels to the Ukraine. I have a letter to him from the children. They asked me to take it to him personally and tell him how much they appreciate his kindness."

There seemed no end to all the things Shura and I had to say to each other. While I prepared supper Shura paced up and down the room, talking. After supper I cleared the table and washed the dishes while Shura paced the room again and continued his stories. Then he made me tell him all about myself, and after that we exchanged reminiscences about our school-days. Shura asked after his old schoolmates—after all, he did not know what had happened to any of them.

"I've been doing all the talking this evening," Shura apologized. "That's because I haven't seen you for so long. You didn't leave Moscow at all, did you? You were here all the time?"

"Yes. You see, I wanted to be here in case my brother came back."

"Did you have a bad time?"

"Not any worse than anybody else. I did some fire-watching on the roof and put out some incendiaries. But you must be used to such things by now."

"No, I haven't learned to get used to them. . . . One of the most bitter experiences for me in these past few years was the sight of Artek just after the fascists were cleared out of there. You ought to have seen what they did to that beautiful Pioneer camp!"

"Yes, I read about it. One of my pupils was there last summer and he told me about it too."

"He could not have seen what we saw. The place has been repaired since then. Do you remember what it was like in the old days?"

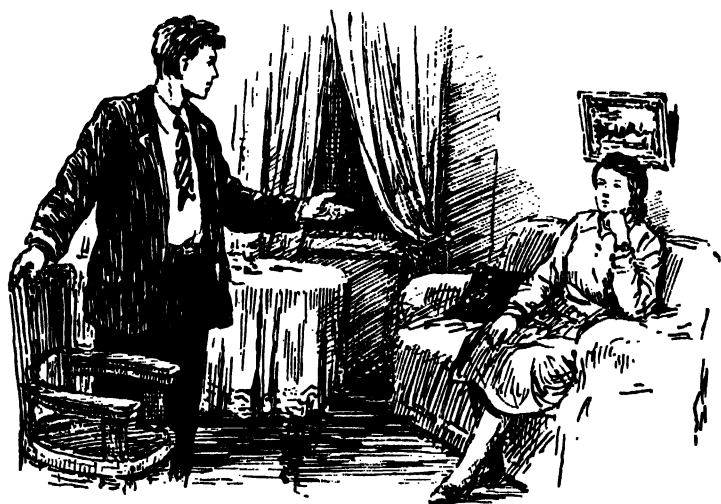
"Of course I do!"

"Then try to imagine it deserted and dead. The doors torn off their hinges, the museum turned into a stable. Remember the park at the Upper Camp? It was used as a pasture for cattle. They removed the bath-tubs from the infirmary and used them for cattle troughs. Remember the lovely palm avenue in the Lower Camp? They tore off the leaves and made whisk brooms out of them. The Suuk-Su palace was burned down. You read about it, you say? Well, I saw it with my own eyes."

I thought of the time I had first visited the All-Union Pioneer Camp in the Crimea. With three other seventh-form pupils I had been sent there from school. I had never seen the sea before, I had never seen mountains or palm-trees, and I had never suspected there could be so much sunshine, so many bright flowers. The house we lived in was as beautiful as a fairy-tale palace and it rang with song and laughter all the livelong day. There were children there from all parts of the country, from

the Ukraine, from Georgia, from Uzbekistan and other republics.

"As soon as Yalta was liberated in 1944 many of the former staff of Artek went to the camp to help rebuild it," Shura told me. "But they could not do much with their bare hands. My unit happened to be stationed nearby,



and they came to our commanding general and asked for help. They didn't ask for much—all they wanted was a truck.

"The general said he would go over to Artek and see what could be done. They conducted him over the place, they showed him the ruins of the house where the children had lived, they showed him where the pier had been and where the children used to hold their camp-fire gatherings. Then they brought him the camp album the children had kept before the war—someone had saved

it from the holocaust. Every page of it was pasted with the photos of happy smiling children. He looked at everything and made no comment. Finally he said: 'Why do you only ask for a truck? Might as well do a thorough job while you're at it.' And so we all set to work to restore Artek. We repaired the villas, the kitchens, the dining-rooms. The Maritime Army sent a crew of electricians and they got the power station going. It was a long time since I'd seen men work with such fervour and zeal. They got genuine pleasure out of it! By the time we got our marching orders the camp was ready to receive the first group of children. I would have given a lot to have seen those kids from Byelorussia, from the Ukraine, from Leningrad and from Stalingrad coming to Artek that time. It must have been a grand sight!"

"Yes, I read about it. . . ."

"But can you imagine what it would have been like to see it with your own eyes!"

I began to understand the change that had come over Shura. In the old days he rarely spoke so frankly and with such feeling even to his closest friends. Now the "protective armour" he had assumed, or what Anna Ivanovna had called his "tortoise shell," had been discarded.

I realized that he had always been warm-hearted underneath, but had merely been ashamed to show it.

GETTING ACQUAINTED

Although my boys were much older than Galya they were just as curious and inquisitive about Shura as she was.

"You must be from the Educational Department," the forward Sasha Vorobeiko ventured.

"No, I have just come to pay you a visit and make friends with you."

When they learned that Shura had come from Stalino their curiosity knew no bounds. Had he been to Pokrovskoye village, they wanted to know. Had he seen the boys and girls who had fought the fascists in the underground organization? Had he seen the secret cave where they had had their head-quarters? Was there really such a big cave and was it there the girls had hidden when the fascists wanted to send them to forced labour camps?

Shura addressed the boys as equals, he spoke to them exactly as he had spoken to me the day before. He answered all their questions about the Pokrovskoye Pioneers, about the Ukrainian school children and about Artek.

"What is your name?" he asked Kira. "Glazkov? You're the one who collects stamps, aren't you? And you're Alexander Vorobeiko, right? And you're Boris Levin, I'm sure." The boys were thunderstruck.

To tell the truth I was rather surprised myself. I had never expected Shura to remember all I had told him about my class. But Shura had always had a remarkable memory and a talent to amuse.

"Marina Nikolayevna must have told you!" Boris cried.

"You think so? All right then, do you want me to tell each of you how old you are?"

"That's easy. We're all about eleven or twelve since we're in the fourth form," Tolya objected.

"That's right too. Very well, shall I tell you how old your mother is?"

"How can you know that?"

"Never mind that, get a piece of paper and a pencil.

No, don't show it to me. Sit over there where I shan't be able to see. Now what size shoe does your mother wear? Don't tell me, write it down. Got that? Multiply that by two. Add five. Done? Now multiply the total by fifty. Add 1,696 to the result, and subtract the year of your mother's birth. What did you get?"

"3,634."

Shura pretended to be thinking hard, then he said:

"Your mother is thirty-four. Right?"

Tolya nodded, speechless with amazement.

There was a general rush for the slip of paper Tolya had written on. The size of his mother's shoe was 36. Tolya had doubled that and got 72, he had added 5 and got 77, multiplied it by 50 and got 3,850. To this he had added 1,696 getting a total of 5,546. Then he had subtracted 1912, the year of his mother's birth, getting 3,634. The first two figures were the size of her shoe, the second two, her age.

What a commotion there was! Lyosha wanted Shura to guess the ages of his two little brothers. Sasha Gai was in despair because he didn't know what size shoes his grandad wore.

"Does it always come out right?" Boris asked.

"This year it does," Shura said. "But in 1949, let us say, after you've done all the multiplication you'll have to add 1,699 instead of 1,696, and in 1950, 1,700."

This was immediately verified and they discovered that Shura could guess anything under the sun. It turned out that he could solve any crossword puzzle, that he knew the answers to all the riddles and could work out all the puzzles that appeared in *Pionerskaya Pravda*. Afterwards we went to the hall and Shura played us the Artek song which had been composed by the Artek

Pioneers themselves, and we learned to sing it then and there.

*The kids are on their way,
With motors spinning round.
"Where can they all be bound?"
A man is heard to say.
He hears the answer gay:
Artek! One, two!
Artek! Three, four!
From Omsk and from Orel,
From mountain and from dell,
From city and from town,
From all the country round.
By ship, by aeroplane,
By buses and by train.
Artek! One, two!
Artek! Three, four!
The sky is azure-blue,
The surf pounds on the shore.
You'll not forget its hue,
You'll not forget its roar.
You'll not forget the camp
Upon the mountain slope.
Artek! One, two!
Artek! Three, four!
Our friendship is sincere,
In need we'll not forget
Russian or Bashkir,
Ukrainian or Lett,
We are one family,
Yes, you and him and me.
Artek! One, two!
Artek! Three, four!*

Shura soon won over my boys completely. He paid several more visits to the class and spent break chatting with the boys.

Some ten days later he left. Everything turned out as we had expected: Shura was going back home as correspondent for *Komsomolskaya Pravda*.

"I shall travel a lot and write about what I see," he said when he came to say good-bye to me. "It ought to be interesting, don't you think?"

He took with him a large parcel of books from our school for the Pioneers and other school children in Pokrovskoye.

NEW FRIENDS

Some two weeks after Shura's departure I opened *Komsomolskaya Pravda* one morning to find a large feature-article bearing his signature.

"Good for Shura!" I said to myself. "He hasn't been wasting time." I started to read the article and to my surprise I found that it was all about my own class. I was horrified and not a little annoyed. Why had he done that? But as I read on I saw that he had not written about me personally but about teaching in general and the difficult yet fascinating job of finding the key to the character of one's pupils. All the problems we had discussed so eagerly that evening were thrashed out in the article and I realized that it would give many a young school-teacher much food for thought. But why had he not told me he was planning to write an article of this kind? That was Shura all over.

Since the names of the pupils and some of the details were changed and the number of the school was

not given none of my boys noticed the article, except Gai who remarked casually:

"There's an article in *Komsomolskaya Pravda* about a teacher named Marina Nikolayevna."

About a fortnight later Anatoli Dmitrievich stopped me in the corridor and asked me to drop into his office for a moment. When I came in he opened a drawer of his desk, took out a packet of letters and handed them to me.

"These are for you."

"For me? From whom?"

"From readers of *Komsomolskaya Pravda*. In answer to that article they carried about the school-teacher, remember? Look at the postmarks—from Arkhangelsk, Kiev, Sverdlovsk, Riga. And several from Moscow. Quite a substantial correspondence, eh?"

From that day I began receiving letters bearing the postmarks of towns I had never seen, some of them so remote that I could not even find them on the map. My correspondents were people of all ages and professions, and it was a discovery for me to find that the education of children was a matter of such vital concern to so many.

They inquired with genuine interest about the boys mentioned in the article, they offered advice and asked me to write. And although I had little enough time for such a voluminous correspondence, those letters were a great comfort to me. It was very gratifying to know that my problems were of interest to so many people.

One of the letters I received in this period came from an address in the Far North. This letter led to so many others and was to have such interesting consequences that I shall give it here in full:

"My dear Marina Nikolayevna,

"It may surprise you to receive a letter from a total stranger. But I trust you will forgive me for trespassing on your time.

"I am a sailor serving in the Northern Fleet.

"I read an article this morning in *Komsomolskaya Pravda* about your class, about your work with your pupils and how interesting a teacher's job can be. After reading that article I felt an irresistible urge to write to you and submit my own ideas on the subject.

"You may not believe it, Marina Nikolayevna, but I too was once very much like one of those boys in your class. I too was an obstinate little cuss and I took a malicious pleasure in annoying my teacher.

"I remember one episode from my school-days. I was in the fifth form then. Our Ukrainian language teacher was a young girl evidently fresh from college. Tamara Ivanovna was her name. Instead of sitting quietly in class I fidgeted, pulled the girls' hair, talked loudly, laughed, cracked jokes and considered myself quite a little hero. I remember all that very well although I am twenty-three now and my school-days seem very remote indeed.

"I do not know what would have happened had it not been for our class master Ivan Petrovich Usik. I shall be grateful to him as long as I live for it was he who taught me to respect others. He made me see how abominably I had behaved. He showed me that I was not a hero at all, as I had supposed, but a ruffian and bully. And he made me thoroughly ashamed of myself. From what I read in that article it seems to me that you are using the same method with your boys as Ivan Petrovich used with me. I wish you every success, Marina Niko-

layevna! I should be very grateful if you could find time to write to me about your pupils. It would give me great pleasure. Please give them all my regards and tell them to work hard at their studies.

"With best wishes,

"Anatoli Alexandrovich Nekhoda."

That day after my lesson I announced to the class that I had received a letter from a sailor in the Northern Fleet who sent them greetings from Dolgaya Guba. The boys crowded around my table, all trying to read the letter at once and bombarding me with questions about the sailor from the Far North. They wanted to know whether he had been in any naval battles, and how long he'd been in the navy. The monitor could not get them out of the class-room to ventilate it before the next lesson, which was drawing, and I was still arguing with them when the drawing teacher arrived. I apologized to her, ordered the boys to their seats and went to the common-room to correct exercise books until my next lesson.

When the drawing class was over I found a good half of my boys outside the common-room waiting for me.

"Marina Nikolayevna," someone piped up impatiently, "we've decided to write to that sailor in the Far North. May we?"

"Of course you may. I have the address."

"We wanted Lyova to write it for us so we could all sign it, but he says we must write it ourselves. You tell him to do it, Marina Nikolayevna!"

"No, he's quite right. You're old enough to write letters yourselves."

"Oh, Marina Nikolayevna, we can't!" objected Borya Levin.

"What nonsense! Why should Lyova write for you?"

"Labutin wrote one during break, but we don't think it's any good."

"Let me see it."

Labutin reluctantly handed me a sheet of paper.

"Dear Com. Nekhoda! We, the pupils of 4-C send you greetings from Moscow. We thank you for your good wishes and ask you to write more about yourself. We promise to study for excellent marks."

"What do you think of it yourself?" I asked Labutin.

"I don't like it very much," he admitted.

"Yes, but why?"

There was silence.

"It doesn't say anything," Goryunov said after a while. "Any one could write a letter like that."

"That's the point. It doesn't tell Anatoli Alexandrovich anything about us, and he wouldn't be able to tell what exactly we wanted to know about him. Write a simple straightforward letter about the things that interest you and he will like it much more."

The boys trooped back to the class-room and proceeded to compose a letter.

The result was a long and detailed account of school life, about how the class had won the volleyball championship and how our chess-players were preparing for the coming chess tournament.

"Have you seen the underground?" they wrote. "If you haven't, write and let us know and we will describe it for you in detail. We can draw you pictures of it if you like. Some of us are quite good at drawing. In our turn

we ask you to tell us all about the North. What sort of landscape you have there? Have you seen the Northern lights? Did you fight in the war? Let us know all the thrilling things that happened to you in the war. Also we would like you to tell us how we can be sailors when



we grow up. Alexander Vorobeiko wants to be a sailor, only he wants to serve in the Black Sea Fleet."

The letter wound up with greetings and "best wishes for success in your naval service".

Gai, flushed and perspiring with the effort of fulfilling his mission with honours, wrote at the dictation of the others, discarding all that he considered superfluous.

I sat at a desk at the back of the room correcting exercise books. Now and again they would interrupt me to ask how to spell some word or to inquire whether I thought he would be interested to know about our exhi-

bition or some other detail of class life. Then Sasha brought the letter to me to read, three closely written pages. I corrected the mistakes (alas, there were a good many!) and the rough draft was given to Labutin to copy because he had the best handwriting in the class. The boys wanted him to sit down and rewrite it then and there, but it was late and I sent them home.

The next morning Labutin brought the letter beautifully rewritten and after lessons we went practically in a body to the letter-box at the end of the street and solemnly dropped the envelope inside.

The boys looked forward impatiently to Nekhoda's reply, although it was obvious that it would take some time for a letter to come from such distant parts.

Every morning they met me with the query: "Any answer yet?" They simply refused to take into account such things as the distance from Moscow to Dolgaya Guba, or the simple fact that Nekhoda might have other things to do besides writing letters to Moscow school-boys. On those rare mornings when no one put the question aloud I could read the unspoken inquiry in their eyes as I entered the class-room and hastened to satisfy their curiosity at once:

"No letter yet."

THE REPLY

But finally it came—a fat, heavy envelope with three large coloured stamps on it. I opened it and immediately read it to them, and for once I had no cause to complain of inattentiveness on the part of my listeners. I read the letter amid perfect silence broken only by sniffs of excitement from the completely spell-bound Volodya Ru-

myantsev whose round eyes met mine each time I paused to turn over a page.

"My dear boys!

"I thank you from the bottom of my heart for your letter. You cannot imagine how delighted I was to receive it, and I sat down to answer it at once.

"When I read your letter I could not help remembering my own school-days and I wished I were a boy again going to school and playing football as I did long ago.

"It is now exactly 23 hours 20 minutes. It is a bright moonlight night, with only five degrees of frost, and the Northern Lights are flashing in the sky. I wish you could see how beautiful they are. The air is as clear and fragrant as after a summer rain. It is a pleasure just to breathe it and to stand and look at the dazzling sky.

"I don't believe there is anything more beautiful than the North. And in my opinion Alexander Vorobeiko is making a mistake by not wanting to serve in the Northern Fleet. If he wishes to be a real sailor he must be sure to serve in the North, because sailors trained in the North are staunch, hardy fellows who can brave any storm, fog or blizzard. And as you know yourself, courage and endurance are the prime qualities in a sailor. A sailor who has neither courage nor stamina is like a man without legs or arms. And so I advise Vorobeiko to join the Northern Fleet.

"I, for one, am so accustomed to the North that I cannot imagine serving anywhere else. In 1945 I went to Germany on some mission. I hadn't been there long before I began counting the days until I could return to the rocky shores of the Barents Sea. And when I left Swinemünde and sailed around the Scandinavian Penin-

sula heading for our own North I felt as if a ton weight had slipped off my shoulders.

"That is what it means to love the North. If Vorobeiko has really made up his mind to be a sailor I say again the North is the only place to go. But he'll have to do a lot of studying before he gets to be a sailor. The sea has no use for untutored, lazy people, as I am sure you know yourselves.

"I am on duty at the helm tonight and I have plenty of time to think about you boys. You ask me to write about some episode from my war-time experience. Well, here goes.

"What I'm going to tell you happened during the 1944 summer campaign when the Hitlerites were pressing particularly hard up here in the North. My ship was assigned along with some others to proceed to Boris Vilkitsky Strait near Cape Chelyuskin to pick up some transports on their way from Vladivostok and convoy them to Arkhangelsk (now if you look up Boris Vilkitsky Strait, Cape Chelyuskin, Vladivostok and Arkhangelsk on the map you'll get an idea what it was all about). After waiting for three days at the appointed spot we set back. We convoyed four transports. At first everything went smoothly. About half-way back, however, the fellow who sits at the apparatus that detects sounds passing through the water shouted 'Contact!' which meant there was a submarine snooping about. All hands were piped to action stations. I stood at the helm. It turned out that an enemy submarine was trying to sink a transport of ours which was carrying a valuable cargo. We set to work to sink the submarine. But to get an enemy boat that's under water is much harder than you might think. The acoustic sounder was all we had to guide us, and when the man

at the ear-phones reported the submarine was heading north-east, the commander gave the order to give pursuit. I held exactly to the course, and in a few minutes the orders came to get the depth charges ready and drop them. We hammered away at the submarine, and some fifteen or twenty minutes later a tool-box, a life-belt and a leather jacket came floating up to the surface. The submarine had been sunk.

"The rest of the convoy had gone on ahead, leaving our ship behind. No sooner had we finished with the submarine than a plane came into sight over the horizon. Quickly it closed in on us, but we were ready for it. The pilot tried to dive-bomb us, but before he knew it, his plane had been ripped open by machine-gun fire. I was wounded in the leg, but I did not leave the helm until the all-clear was sounded.

"You might wonder how the plane got there. I dare say the fascist submarine managed to radio for help before we hit it. But the plane went the way of the submarine. Later it was established that the submarine was of the ocean-going kind, more than a hundred metres in length. It had been damaged by our depth charges, and had nose-dived into the sand. That's the whole story.

"We reached Arkhangelsk safe and sound. A banquet was given in our honour right away and, according to an old naval custom, we were given a roasted suckling for the enemy boat we had sunk.

"In my next letter I shall tell you about how we were torpedoed twice, but on one condition—that your next letter is three times as long as your first. Is it a go?

"Greetings to you from all my pals on board. They join me in wishing you every success.

"Well, good-bye for this time. I am looking forward impatiently to your reply.

"Your friend

"Anatoli Nekhoda."

I need hardly say that the reply was written at once and that it was at least three times as long as its predecessor. Nor need I say that Sasha Vorobeiko at once resolved to join the Northern Fleet, and nearly all the other boys vowed to learn all about the North, and to go and work there. Sasha was extremely flattered because nearly half the letter was about him. In fact, besides joining in the class letter to our Northern sailor friend, he wrote him a personal letter, signing it with his full name—Alexander Vasilievich Vorobeiko.

Anatoli Alexandrovich wrote regularly and often. He not only answered the boys' letters, but he sometimes wrote without waiting for their answers. In one of their letters the boys had mentioned sending books to Pokrovs-koye village. In his letter Nekhoda wrote:

"I know Pokrovskoye. I am from the Ukraine myself. My family lived in those parts. My mother and father, two brothers and a sister all perished when the Hitler-ites burned down the village. I am quite alone in the world."

"How shall we answer that?" said Gai softly, when Lyova had finished reading.

They did not mention the matter in their next letter but I think they realized then that this correspondence was as important to Anatoli Alexandrovich as it was to them.

The boys took turns writing, then the letters were read out in class and were posted only after being approved by

all. One day when Boris offered to read the letter he had written to Anatoli Alexandrovich, Ryabinin remarked drily:

"There's not much point in sending it today. Five of us got 'twos' for dictation and you were turned out of the drawing lesson. Are we going to write about that?"

Boris flushed. He had to admit that really there was not much to write about that day and he stuffed the letter into his pocket without another word.

Nekhoda was in the habit of inquiring about each of the boys by name. Picking some name at random from the list of signatures to the first letter, he would ask how so-and-so was getting on at school, what his favourite subject was, who was his best friend, what games he liked best, and whether teacher was satisfied with his progress. In this way he got to know a great many of the boys. On days when someone got a bad mark the boys did not write to the North; they only wanted to write when there was good news to report. And anyone who got a "two" could not help feeling that he had let the class down by depriving the others of the pleasure of answering their friend's letter in time. This new friendship brought much joy into our lives and became part and parcel of our existence.

RED-LETTER DAY

Morning was still far off but the streets were lit up as bright as day. The glow from myriads of electric lamps reflected on crimson banners resembled the rosy light of dawn. It was February 10, the day of the elections to the Supreme Soviet.

I thought I would be first at the polling station, but I found a whole crowd there before me, and the warm vital torrent of humanity flowed in an endless stream.

Katayev was our candidate. Valentin Petrovich Katayev, author of so many splendid books. I read his *A White Sail Gleams* and *Son of the Regiment* not long ago and the touching friendship of Petya and Gavrik, the fate of little Vanya Solntsev, who was adopted by a regiment of Soviet fighting men when he lost his parents, were still fresh in my memory. I thought of all this as I stood alone in the little booth with my ballot paper. I had never met the man who wrote those books, yet I knew all about him; for whether intentionally or not, his books had told me much about him. I knew that Katayev was a man who dearly loved his native land, loved its children and wished them peace and happiness with all his heart. And as I dropped my ballot paper into the box I said to myself: This is for our truth, for our happiness!

From the polling station I went straight to school to see what was happening there, for our school, too, was a polling station. Our senior pupils, Lyova among them, had been canvassers. And where Lyova was, there my boys would be sure to be—his most zealous assistants. They helped him to distribute notices to electors and invitations to meetings and talks. They worked with him decorating the premises, and Sasha Vorobeiko and Seryozha Selivanov took part in a concert for the voters—Sasha recited a poem and Seryozha played a piece on the accordion. Seryozha's turn was a great success. He played with all the gusto of the true accordion-player, his dark eyes flashing, his head wagging in time to the music and a mischievous smile on his lips.

I discovered that many of our boys knew quite a lot about the elections. Ryabinin's mother turned out to be a personal friend of candidate Ivan Panin, the locomotive-driver, and Lyosha told us some interesting details about this village lad who had become a Hero of Socialist Labour. Ilyinsky's elder sister had been a neighbour of Seryogina, the weaver, deputy from the textile mill. As for the school-teacher deputy, Leonova, we considered her our own private deputy because Rummyantsev's father had been a pupil of hers.

"Just imagine, that was when he was in the first form," said Volodya. "Daddy says she's a wonderful teacher. This is the second time she's been a candidate. That shows what a good deputy she was."

... Of course they were all there in the school playground—Gai, Selivanov, Levin and Vorobeiko.

"Everybody's voting except us! We've such a long time to wait!" Levin wailed as they crowded round me. The next minute he dashed off to help an old lady up the steps. "Lean on me, Granny! I'll show you the way!"

"No, let me!" cried another boy running up at the same time. But to our delight the elderly voter preferred Borya. "I know Borya," she said, "he has been in my house. He brought me a ticket to the election meeting."

Borya and the old lady disappeared inside the building. The snow made a pleasant scrunching noise under the feet of the voters who continued to pour in. They came, whole families at a time. The younger members of the family were left in the care of the children's room, but as often as not it was the youngest member of the family who dropped father's ballot into the box. And how proud he was to be entrusted with such an important grown-up task!

Presently Kira Glazkov came running up all agog with excitement. We all knew that his eldest brother had turned eighteen that day. What a piece of luck to have been born exactly on February 10! If his birthday had been one day later he couldn't have voted.

But that was not all. Yesterday Kira's uncle arrived on a visit from the Far East. Before he left home he was given a certificate from his local electoral committee enabling him to vote wherever he happened to be on the election day. Now guess which of the Moscow polling stations he chose?

Of course we had no difficulty in guessing. Since he had the choice, Kira's uncle naturally went to the Stalin election district so as to be able to vote for the candidate chosen by the whole people—Joseph Vissarionovich Stalin.

"That's right," Kira confirmed. "You can't imagine how many people from other cities are voting in that district. But my uncle was one of the first to register his vote. Everyone who comes to town today makes a bee-line for the Stalin district. Uncle Volodya says he saw all sorts of people there—collective farmers, sailors, soldiers—and from all over the country."

Kira had evidently been cross-examining his uncle closely for he knew all the details about the voting in the Stalin election district. "Look," he said breathlessly, "it isn't ten o'clock yet but over at uncle's district nearly everyone has voted already."

Lyova, hurrying by with a beaming face, remarked in passing: "Nearly all our voters have come already. Next time I'll be voting myself!"

"When will next time be?" Gai asked.

"Don't you remember what the Constitution says: every four years!"

"We shan't be old enough even then," Kira said with a sigh. "I'll only be 15 by then, isn't it a shame..."

But we had no time for such sad thoughts.

"Where are we going this evening?" Goryunov asked in a conspiratorial whisper. We all smiled in response. We were going to the theatre tonight!

What a lovely day that was! There had been a festive air about it since early morning, although it was only a Sunday. But of course it was not an ordinary Sunday, for it is not every Sunday the people go to the polls to elect their chosen candidates, to vote for the truth, for their happiness, for the joyous present and a bright future for their children!

EIGHTH OF MARCH

Before we knew it, March came around. The mornings were still frosty and there was a nip in the air. But the soft blue of the sky and the fluffy cloudlets spoke of spring. On March 8 a flower-stall opened at our street corner, selling the first mimosa of the season. The bright yellow bolls looked as fluffy as newly-hatched chicks.

I entered the class-room and stopped short in amazement: on my desk stood a huge bunch of mimosa and, beside it, a large metal inkstand, a thick exercise book in a handsome dark blue binding and a big box of chocolates.

The boys stood bright-eyed and expectant, watching for my reaction. Next to the inkstand lay a sheet of thick white paper on which in a hand too neat for me to recognize was the printed inscription:

*To Dear Marina Nikolayevna for International
Women's Day from her Pupils*

I still do not know whether it is right for a teacher to accept gifts from her pupils. I remember when I was a schoolgirl what joy it gave us to club together and buy a gift for our teacher on such occasions, and I know how bitterly hurt we would have been had our gift been rejected. Still I was taken aback by the boys' offering and I really did not know what to say.

"Thank you very much, boys," I said at last. "But really, you know, the best present you could think of would be to write your dictation today without mistakes."

"I knew it, I knew you'd say that!" cried Borya, in triumph and chagrin.

"Now, here's what we'll do," I said, opening the chocolate box. "Let's celebrate Women's Day. You begin, Tolya!" I offered the box to Goryunov. But Goryunov hid his hands behind his back, compressed his lips and shook his head.

"Now, it isn't polite to refuse, you know. Come on, hurry up and take one. The others are waiting," I urged him. Tolya glanced helplessly around and hesitantly took a sweet. "Now you, Sasha. That's right! Now Lyosha, Borya, Volodya," and I went from desk to desk until the box was empty. (Fortunately there were enough chocolates to go round.) Gradually the expression of disapproval on the boys' faces gave way to broad smiles and everyone was happy.

"Now what shall we do with the exercise book?" I said. "I have a suggestion. Suppose we use it for writing down our opinions of the books we read."

"But ... but how can we all write in it?" Ilyinsky asked looking puzzled.

"We can write in turn. Suppose you have just read a very good book. You like it so much that you want to

tell someone about it. You take the exercise book from Lyosha's cupboard and write down your ideas about the book. The others will read what you've written and they'll want to read the book too."

"But what shall we write?"

"Well, to start with," I said, taking the chalk and turning to the blackboard (the boys reached for their note-books), "you put down the name of the author and the title of the book..."

"And then the contents in brief?" Sasha Gai put in.

"Oh no," Borya objected. "No one would want to read the book after that. Why should I read it when I know beforehand how it's going to end?"

I suggested that they copy out some passage in the book that particularly appealed to them.

"That's right, the most interesting part, so you can tell what sort of a book it is," Borya supported me.

"Yes, but you're giving away all your presents. There'll be nothing left for you," Sasha Vorobeiko said in a hurt voice.

"There are the flowers," I said.

"And the ink-well too," added Ryabinin. "Ilyinsky's father made it at his factory. Specially for you."

"For me? That's lovely. The inkstand and the flowers will stand on my desk then."

In the interests of truth it must be admitted that there was no dictation that day. And that was bad, of course.

THE BLUE BOOK

The boys loved story-books and we read a great deal together after school. Vera Alexandrovna, the school's head librarian, laughingly remarked on more than one

occasion that she had a hard time keeping my boys supplied with books. "I always know what goes on in your class," she said. "Your boys come running to me right away asking for the book Marina Nikolayevna told them about!"

Sometimes I would relate some interesting episode from a book they had not read. That would arouse their curiosity and they would beg me to tell them more. But I would not let myself be persuaded. "Get the book and find out," I would say firmly. Or else I would tell them part of the story and break off at the most exciting point with the words: "You can read the rest yourselves."

This latter method was particularly trying for Borya Levin. That excitable, impatient lad could not bear to be left in suspense about the fate of a book's heroes.

"Just tell us whether it has a happy ending or not," he would beg. "Please, Marina Nikolayevna."

The others would chime in and they would plead with me in chorus:

"Oh, Marina Nikolayevna, do tell us, please! Just say how it ends."

But I would not satisfy their curiosity. Once I had succeeded in arousing their interest in this way I knew that they would be sure to get the book, however difficult it might be to obtain.

And now our special exercise book in its dark blue cover—the Blue Book, we called it—began to play an important part in our lives.

There were some amusing entries in the beginning. According to Vitya Ilyinsky, for example, the author of *Gulliver's Travels* was someone by the name of Svist.*

* Svist is Russian for "whistle".—Tr.

Sasha Vorobeiko read a Nenets story about a mother who turned into a cuckoo and flew away from her heartless children, and he liked it so much that he copied the whole thing into the Blue Book from beginning to end. We all enjoyed reading this moving little tale, but we told Sasha that the purpose of the book was not for copying out whole stories but only for those parts we liked most.

"But what if I liked all of it?" Sasha argued with some logic.

"*Captain Grant's Children* is a good story too, but you couldn't very well copy out the whole book, could you?" said Goryunov.

I explained that the idea was to digest what we read and select some of the more outstanding passages. But I could not help thinking that it would indeed be hard to single out any particular passage from "The Cuckoo"—it was so subtly woven together and so delicate in design that it reminded one of the fine bone-carvings made by artists from the Far North.

Gradually the boys learned to select excerpts from the books they read and I never failed to find their entries most interesting.

Here is a passage from Gaidar's story "The Blue Cup" which Goryunov chose to copy into the Blue Book.

"'Well what do you say?' asked Svetlana, the sly one, picking up her sleepy kitten. 'Would you say we're living badly now?'"

"A golden moon shone over our garden. A train bound for the north thundered faintly somewhere in the distance. An aeroplane on a night flight throbbed overhead and disappeared into the clouds.

"And you know what, Comrades, life really was good!"

Gai quoted the following excerpt from Gaidar's *Timur and His Squad*:

"Timur raised his head.

"Lovable, warm-hearted lad that he was, he answered exactly as might have been expected.

"He swept his eyes over his friends, smiled and said:

" 'I'm not worried. I see everybody feels fine. Then I feel fine too! ' "

The passages the children selected from their reading supplied the key to their own thoughts and emotions. As time went on the impartial copying of excerpts ceased to satisfy them and they began to express opinions about the books they read.

At first their remarks were limited to a few words: "Very good book. I could read it over and over." Or: "Wonderful book. I read it five times!"

But gradually the comments grew longer and developed into brief reviews.

"I think it is a pity that all the sufferings of Kolya and Lena were in vain," Tolya Goryunov wrote about the story "Searching for Father". "In my opinion the author shouldn't have made them suffer so much to no purpose."

I thought Tolya's criticism was extremely just. The book did leave one with a sense of frustration. Lena and Kolya seemed to be continually running away from their friend without being aware of it and all Kolya's efforts to save the little girl, to protect her from danger were futile. What was the purpose of it all? One can accept suffering and sacrifice if it is worth while, if it is for the sake of some great and noble goal. But if the ordeals and hardships described are obviously artificial, if the story consists of a series of exciting but improbable episodes, nothing is gained by reading such a book.

The popularity of our Blue Book grew as time went on. Some boys wrote more often than others, but there wasn't a boy in the class who did not make some contribution.

After reading Borya Levin's comment about some book one simply had to get it and read it for oneself. Borya usually expressed himself: "Just read *Fourth Altitude*. Liked it enormously. What a brave girl that Gulya Korolyova was! She didn't know the meaning of fear!" Or: "I have read about the life and adventures of Amundsen. Have begun to take cold showers every morning."

Borya Levin was always eager to test everything in practice. He tried to model himself on the heroes in the books he read. And he was not the only one who took his reading so seriously. When Goryunov came back to school after a long illness and found that he was a long way behind the rest of the class in English, he refused my offer to get one of the senior-form boys to coach him.

"No thanks," he said. "I'll manage myself."

"But it will be very hard for you to catch up with us. We'll ask Lyova and he'll..."

"Don't bother. I'll do it myself," Tolya replied politely but firmly, adding as he noticed my surprise: "When Gulya Korolyova was behind with her geography, she caught up with the rest without anyone's help, remember?"

EXAMINATIONS

Beginning with January a new word entered our class-room lexicon: examinations. Their first examinations! And with an examining board including representatives from the Department of Public Education! It was no joke. I believe I was even more nervous at the

prospect than the boys. It actually haunted my dreams at night. One night I dreamt that Anatoli Dmitrievich opened the envelope with the examination papers, and handed me one. I read it over hurriedly and saw to my horror that my class would never be able to do it: it contained words and rules of grammar of which even I had never heard. That dream left me with a most unpleasant sensation and I began to fear that it might come true.

With the approach of spring we received the lists of the test questions. We pounced on them eagerly, reading and re-reading them and discussing them from all angles. Would the class be able to cope with them?

Gradually we calmed down. Kira's mother typed the texts of the arithmetic and Russian questions and everyone was given a copy.

Many of the boys prepared for the exams together. I learned that Goryunov, Gai and Levin met regularly at Gai's house to work on the questions, and sometimes Goryunov and Sasha Vorobeiko would go to Rumyantsev's to study. Ilyinsky worked with Selivanov, Vyruchka with Glazkov.

As for myself, I was genuinely nervous. The boys, I believe, only pretended to be nervous, knowing that one is supposed to be afraid of exams. They had heard about the terrors of exams from older boys ever since they had come to school and even before that. "You don't know anything yet," Borya Levin's older sister (as blue-eyed and snub-nosed as Borya himself) used to say scornfully. She was in the fifth form at the girls' school next door to ours. "Wait till you have exams. . . ."

Borya came to me in despair: "Is it really so terrible, Marina Nikolayevna?" he asked. "Tell us, what were exams like before the Revolution?"

I confess I was a trifle shocked to discover how aged my boys thought me. Borya evidently took it for granted that I had been a living witness of examinations in the tsarist Gymnasium!

In preparation for the exams I gave them plenty of writing exercises, carefully analyzing every mistake they made. To my great relief I saw that they were making progress from lesson to lesson and that there were fewer mistakes than formerly. But I was far from reassured, for I knew that there is a vast difference between writing exercises under ordinary conditions, and writing at examinations.

The day before the examinations, we tidied up the class-room, bought bunches of lilac and put them in vases on my desk and on the window-sills. The room was sweet with their fragrance.

"Won't they fade by tomorrow morning?" the boys asked in concern. "Shall we wear white shirts and our Pioneer ties? Oh, I do hope Mother hasn't forgotten to iron my white shirt!"

"I've ironed everything myself already," Gai said proudly.

There was something holiday-like about the preparations. It reminded us of the exciting days before the May Day celebrations, except that now a grave troubled look would come over the boys' faces in the midst of the excitement, as if they were asking themselves, as Levin had asked me: "Is it really so awful? How will I manage tomorrow? Will I be able to answer all the questions?"

On the morning of the examinations, as on the morning of my first day at school, I rose very early, dressed quickly and hurried outside.

It was the 20th of May, my birthday. I was twenty-three. Twenty-three years! Nearly twice the age of my pupils. And these were my first examinations.

Yes, my first examinations. For everything that had gone before, the graduation exams at school and even the final exams at the institute—all that was nothing compared to what I was experiencing now. For today was to be the test of all the knowledge I had accumulated in those past years at school and institute.

It was very cool and quiet in my street. A lime-tree thrust its fresh green branches through the railings of the house next door. It had rained during the night and the old lime-tree, which had been rather late this year in putting out its leaves, was now adding its touch of colour to the green of the gardens and boulevards.

Ahead of me walked a woman with a little girl of about twelve. One end of a red Pioneer tie stuck out comically from under the little girl's collar between her two tightly plaited braids. She must have pulled on her coat in a hurry.

"Now remember, Lena, take special care with your prefixes. Read over your work carefully before you hand it in. You won't forget?"

"Another fourth-form pupil," I thought.

The school-yard was as crowded and noisy as during the long break. Evidently I was not the only early riser that morning. I soon found my boys. They were all as neatly turned out and as excited as if it really was a holiday. Lyova was with them, and not with his ninth-form friends, although he might have been excused for attending to his own affairs on this day. Of course he had no cause to be nervous. The first examination in the ninth form was geography, and judging by the confi-

dence with which he had led my boys on imaginary geographical tours to all parts of the globe (he had introduced that fascinating game this term), there was hardly any need to be worried about him.

"Good morning, Marina Nikolayevna! Good morning!" came from all sides.

"Good morning," I replied. "You may congratulate me. It is my birthday today."

Amid the gay chorus of congratulations that followed I heard Vorobeiko ask in a business-like tone: "And how old are you today?"

"I am one year less than I was before," I replied jokingly.

"One year less? How's that?"

"Of course! Suppose you had five rubles, and you spent one ruble, how much would you have left? One ruble less, right? Well, I lived one more year, that leaves me with one year less than before," I explained gravely as I made my way through the crowd to the entrance.

I was in a hurry. I wanted to have a look at the examination papers as soon as the envelopes were opened. The boys followed me, laughing and shouting their greetings.

The first person I met in the corridor was Anatoli Dmitrievich.

"Hurry up," he said. "We're going to Ludmilla Philipovna's office to unseal the envelopes."

All the teachers were assembled in Ludmilla Philipovna's room and I am sure that all of them, experienced and novices alike, held their breath as she took the large envelope from her cupboard and broke open the seal. I doubt whether we looked much calmer at that moment than the pupils we were about to examine.

At last I held the examination paper in my hands. I tried to read it but I was too excited to make out anything. At that moment the gentle voice of Natalya Andreyevna sounded beside me. "Now then, calm yourself, my dear," she said. "It is a very good story, and the children will manage it splendidly. You'll see, everything will be fine. I know your boys write very well."

The bell rang and the boys climbed up to the fourth floor in single file. Then in complete silence they took their seats and waited, stock still, their eyes glued to my face.

I read them the story. It was about Trusov, a pilot who saved his comrade's life.

Levin began writing the minute the last words were out of my mouth. Goryunov stared in frowning concentration at the sheet of foolscap before him, evidently forming the opening sentence in his mind. Savenkov looked at me, and only when I answered his look and smiled at him did he bend over his paper.

One minute passed, then another. And now they were all writing. There was complete silence in the class-room, broken only by the scratching of the pens and an occasional sigh. Heads were bent low over the desks and pens moved swiftly over the paper. Outside the open windows the sparrows twittered noisily and tram-cars clanged loudly a few streets away. But for the boys the outside world with its sights and sounds had ceased to exist—they were completely engrossed in their work. Watching them, I marvelled to think that only a year ago I had not even dreamed of their existence, and now every one of them had grown dear to me and I wished them success with all my heart.

Some ten minutes before the prescribed time they began turning in their work, and by the time the bell

nang all forty sheets of foolscap were on my desk. The boys crowded round me but I drove them away. If only they knew how impatient I was to see what they had written!

"Run along now," I said. "Be sure and come back tomorrow at six for consultation. Don't forget that the day after tomorrow you have. . ."

"Oral Russian!" they wound up in chorus.

. . . They had done well, my boys. They had related the story as simply and naturally as if the hero had been their own good friend.

Volodya Rumyantsev, describing pilot Trusov's exploit, wound up with the words: "That is how Captain Trusov kept to the rule followed by all our fighting men: never to abandon a comrade in distress."

Seryozha Selivanov added a postscript to his paper: "That is what my elder brother did." Realizing that this remark had no direct bearing on his examination work he wrote it lower down the page. But the story was so true to life that he simply could not refrain from mentioning his brother.

Some three hours later I was on my way home.

What a lovely day it was! The sun shone so brightly and the sky was so blue. I could not remember having had such fine weather on previous birthdays.

Two young men walking in the opposite direction stopped me as I was about to pass them.

"I say, what subject were you given for composition?" one of them asked familiarly.

I stared uncomprehending.

"Aren't you in the tenth form?" the other inquired.

"Certainly not!" I retorted indignantly. "I'm twenty-three and what's more, I'm a school-teacher." And with

that I walked on, paying no heed to their laughing, embarrassed apologies, although as soon as I was out of earshot, I realized it was foolish of me to take offence.

... Two days later the Russian oral examination took place. Anatoli Dmitrievich himself sat on the examining board. He questioned every boy in turn, thoroughly testing their knowledge.

He put one rather tricky question to Savenkov and I waited nervously for the boy's answer, hoping fervently that he would not fall into the trap. He started to say something but caught himself in time, and I sighed with relief when I saw by the movement of his lips that he had caught on.

Anatoli Dmitrievich repeated the question and smiled at the eagerness with which the boy gave the right answer.

... One slight misunderstanding occurred during the arithmetic examination.

"What year is this?" my assistant Lidia Ignatyevna asked Sasha Gai, after he had solved the problem given him quickly and correctly.

"Nineteen forty-six."

"How many centuries does that make?"

"Nineteen."

"And what century are we living in?"

Sasha's answer was a surprise to us all: "In the twenty-first," he said.

As often happens, he was too confused to perceive his mistake, and kept insisting that he was right.

"Of course, this is the twenty-first century."

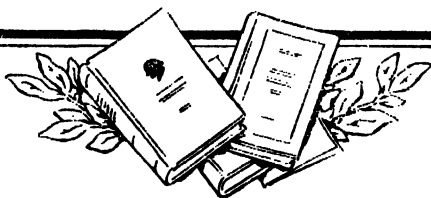
"They *are* in a hurry!" Lidia Ignatyevna remarked with a smile.

Three boys passed their examinations with honours. They were praised so highly that I was afraid their heads

would be turned. I was not worried about Tolya Goryunov, or even about Borya Levin, for Borya was perhaps too light-hearted to be conceited. But Morozov positively swelled with pride, pleasure and joy and he could not tear himself away from the wall-newspaper, where his name was mentioned, or the bulletin board on which his photograph was posted along with the other top pupils of the school.

A gay, summery mood had taken possession of us all. Summer—one long, sunny holiday—was near at hand. It had been a good year. True, it had not been easy, but perhaps that was the very reason why it had been good!

Part Two





ON THE VOLGA

Before the summer holidays had even begun I knew I would miss the boys. But I did not realize how much until I had actually parted from them.

I went off to a rest home on the Volga. I have always loved the forest and I never tire of wandering among its green labyrinths. Here I was free to roam in the woods to my heart's content, the river enthralled me from the first moment, and I was surrounded by fresh faces. . . .

Lying on the soft sun-baked sand, watching the cool sparkling silver of the river flow by endlessly, tirelessly, I found my thoughts turning to my class. I wondered why Volodya Rumyantsev and Andrei Morozov had begun to quarrel so frequently of late. They had been such good friends. Yes, and Morozov. . . . I really knew so little about him. A capable youngster, but how ambitious!

He never confided his thoughts and plans to me as the others did. Why was that? I did not know. He was an able and persevering pupil, there was no denying it. And he did equally well in all subjects. But I had noticed for some time that he did not seem to take much interest in his school work. He always gave the right answers when called upon, he solved arithmetic problems correctly and recited poetry smoothly, but whatever he did was entirely without enthusiasm. But when I told him I was giving him a "five", his narrow, thin-lipped face would light up with satisfaction. He seemed to value the mark for its own sake, as if he was not so much acquiring knowledge as hoarding good marks, hoarding them doggedly and passionately, like a miser, revelling in them and keeping a strict account of them.

It occurred to me as I recalled all this that Morozov was one of the few boys in the class with whom my relations were limited solely to school affairs, to giving him a good mark for answering well or for writing dictation without a single mistake. On the face of it he and I ought to have got along quite well. But we did not. I could not make out why this should be so, but I had been conscious of it for some time. Perhaps it was because of the lad's eagerness to excel in everything, to be at the top of the class, because this was his sole aim and his only source of satisfaction.

Another ambitious youngster was Vitya Ilyinsky. His father had come to me once and told me that he feared his son would get a swelled head. But his was a conceit of a different kind—more natural, somehow. He frankly loved to be praised. And although I was careful not to overdo it, I took pleasure in praising Vitya: he seemed to blossom out when praised and would try still harder

afterwards. After my talk with his father I took care not to commend him too often and I persuaded myself that although Vitya was proud of his "mathematical bump", his head was not turned by success and he did not try to put his classmates in the shade.

Then there was Vasya Vorobeiko. What did I know about Vasya? Very little, hardly anything in fact. His report card was full of "threes". . . . There were no "twos", but "fours" were very rare. Whenever he got a "four" he would flush with pleasure but say nothing. His brother Sasha, however, never hid his delight when Vasya got a good mark, and although he himself had far more "threes" than "fours", he would always amuse me by remarking patronizingly: "Good for you, boy! You ought to do that more often!" Or: "Keep at it Vasya, keep at it and you'll make good."

Sasha ordered his brother about and Vasya obeyed without a murmur. Vasya was forever fetching and carrying for Sasha, and if he didn't fetch and carry fast enough, he was liable to have his head punched. But woe betide anyone else who tried to molest Vasya. "Leave Vasya alone; if there's any punching to do I'll do it," was the sum and substance of Sasha's attitude towards his brother. And the boys soon learned that they had best respect that maxim.

"Why must you always take his part?" I once asked Sasha. "He isn't a baby, he can take care of himself."

"That's just the trouble, he can't. He doesn't know how to fight properly."

"But why do you treat him so shabbily yourself?"

"Me?" Sasha was clearly amazed at the suggestion. Evidently he considered the slaps he administered were his own, brotherly prerogative.

"Really you aren't nice to him at all," I insisted. "Look at the way you order him about. He doesn't talk to you like that, does he now?"

Sasha considered this for a moment.

"I'm older than him," he said at length.

"How can you be older if you're twins?"

"I was born first."

"Look at Lyova," I said, "he's older than all of you. What's more, he's your Pioneer leader. But have you ever heard him talking to anyone the way you talk to Vasya?"

Sasha listened to my argument with interest but it did not impress him particularly. I daresay he agreed with me in theory. But his relations with his brother had been formed from babyhood and had become a habit. Moreover it was so easy to order Vasya about; he always meekly did as he was told.

The two boys were now in the village visiting their grandmother. Kolya Savenkov had gone to a summer camp. Lyova was there, too, and he had promised to write to me.

I often thought about Kolya. One day during the spring term Vera Kondratyevna, the singing mistress, had come to me, greatly annoyed, and dragging an unwilling Kolya by the hand.

"He refuses to sing with the others," she complained. "I don't know what to do with him. He simply won't open his mouth. If everyone refuses to sing there won't be any singing lesson."

"Why won't you sing?" I asked the boy. But he continued to stare sullenly at his feet without answering.

When I left school I found him waiting for me as usual outside in the street, and as always he blurted out without any preliminaries:

"They were all singing: 'Our daddies have come home again.' Why should I sing that?"

I noticed that he and Sasha Gai had grown very chummy of late, and I had heard that Kolya had been to Sasha's house a few times. Sasha was spending his summer holidays in Tula with Ivan Ilyich. I could picture the two of them, grandfather and grandson, pottering about in the garden, where he "grows everything under the sun", although it was no bigger than the palm of your hand.

Goryunov was in Artek. He would come back full of exciting impressions.

Many hours would pass by in such pleasant reflections. Meantime the sun would be high up in the sky, and, with great fiery circles swimming before my tightly closed eyelids, I would realize that I had better be going before I was burnt to a cinder.

"A penny for your thoughts," I would hear the gay young voice of Nina Stanitsina, my room-mate, beside me. "Come on! Let's go in for a swim!"

And between swimming and sunning ourselves we would while the morning away until dinner-time.

Nina was a student at an institute of transport engineers. My other room-mate, Lyuba Timoshenko, was studying constructional engineering. We spent a great deal of time together, for besides sharing the same room, we all sat at the same table in the dining-room.

NOCTURNAL REFLECTIONS

One night, when we had already retired to bed and were chatting idly on various topics before "lights out", the talk turned to two unforgettable days in our lives: June 22, the day the war broke out, and May 9, Victory

Day. And we each recalled what had happened to us on those two memorable occasions.

Listening to Nina and Luyba, I found my thoughts straying back to the recent past. How vividly I remembered every detail of June 22 and May 9. . . .

I was in Leningrad when the war broke out. My brother Shura was spending his vacation there after completing a post-graduate course and had taken me with him. Neither of us had been to this wonderful city before. We took trips to the islands, went to the Hermitage Museum, and on the evening of June 21, on our way home from a concert, we wandered for a long time through the hazy white night. It seemed we would never tire of feasting our eyes on this beautiful city. How happy we were! How many wonderful plans we made for the future!

The following day we rose late, breakfasted as usual and went out, blissfully unaware that anything untoward had happened. And then that awful word struck like a bolt from the blue: war!

We hurried back to Moscow.

Soon afterwards Shura joined the army. In March 1942 he was killed near Gzhatsk.

And then, Victory Day!

I woke up in the middle of the night with fear clutching at my heart: someone was running downstairs knocking loudly at all the doors on the way. I was too sleepy to realize what was happening, but the knocking brought back the painful memory of those nights in 1941 and 1942 when there would be the same knocking at the door and a voice on the stairs would give the air-raid warning. But what could it be now? At that moment the knocking reached my own door and I heard a boy's voice shout gaily: "The war's over! The war's over!"

There are some joys that are too overwhelming to be borne alone. And although it was the dead of night, everyone hurried outside. The street was already full of people. And I remembered again those now distant nights when in pitch darkness, holding our breath and fearing to light a match, we huddled together in this same yard awaiting our turn to enter the bomb shelter. I remembered the pale, lined faces of the women as they emerged after the "all-clear" signal, carrying their sleeping children in their arms. Coming out of the cellar on one such night we found the whole yard covered with fragments of shattered glass sparkling and glittering with a hard unnatural light under the moon. A bomb had exploded nearby and blown all the windows out.

Yes, none of this would be forgotten. Yet it did not mar the happiness that shone now in every face. That night you could have gone into any house, knocked at any door and struck up a conversation with anyone on the street, for all were united by an overwhelming joy at the knowledge that the war was over at last!

That day the sun seemed to shine more brightly, the sky to be a deeper blue than usual. Moved by a common impulse everyone made for the Red Square. Entire families crowded the white sun-warmed grand stands; old men, leaning on their sticks, old women with kerchiefs on their heads. Children were running about everywhere; groups of young girls with radiant faces walked along arm in arm; there was a hubbub of conversation and laughter. The hours went by. The bright blue May sky faded to a pale lilac, then turned indigo. And the people kept pouring into the square.

When at last the voice of the radio announcer came over the loud speakers, a hush fell over the square.

broken almost at once by glad cries of: "Stalin will speak!"

His first word, that simple and beautiful word "Comrades!", plunged the square into silence again.

By me stood a tall woman past middle age. Her lips were tightly compressed, she stared straight before her and the tears streamed down her cheeks. Nearby a little boy on his father's shoulders stared at her with an expression in which surprise, sympathy and reproach were mingled: how could she weep on a day like this? He was too small to know why she wept, but I knew, and so did many, many other people gathered on the square.

Then came the words: "I congratulate you on our victory, my dear countrymen and countrywomen!" Searchlight beams weaved an intricate pattern of light in the sky and seemed to lift to an unimaginable height above us. Another moment and a fountain of flame and light burst through the velvety darkness—the artillery salute! The Spasskaya Tower of the Kremlin wall stood straight and tall and beautiful, a majestic symbol of peace and tranquillity. And over the Kremlin Palace a huge crimson flag waved and fluttered in the breeze like some great bird.

Wonderful, never-to-be-forgotten day! Day of joy and sadness. . . .

Just then Nina's voice wakened me from my reverie:

"The happiest event in my life?" she was saying, echoing Lyuba's question. "There have been so many I can't seem to single out any particular one."

How appropriate, I reflected, that the memory of Victory Day should invariably be associated with happiness.

"I don't mean ordinary happiness," Lyuba insisted. "I mean something especially outstanding."

There was a pause. I waited eagerly to hear what Nina would say.

"Very well," she said at last, "but remember I warned you. I told you nothing remarkable has ever happened to me. I have had a very ordinary life. So don't blame me if what I am going to tell you turns out to be dull."

"During the war I worked as a guard on a train running between Moscow and Novosibirsk. It was a Kom-somol crew, all girls. As workers were scarce in war-time we all took a course in house painting and carpentry so as to be able to do our own inside repair work. Most of our passengers on the Moscow run were army men or people with special commissions in the capital, and on the return trip they were mostly women and children, evacuees from the Ukraine, Byelorussia and Leningrad. A good many of the children travelled alone because their parents had been killed, and they were so sad and silent that it made your heart ache to look at them.

"We racked our brains for some way to cheer up the poor little things and finally we decided to rig up a children's carriage on the train and make a really good job of it. We were in Novosibirsk at the time, taking a few days' rest before the next trip. We clubbed together and bought a lot of toys, and each one of us donated something—dishes, books, flowers—whatever we could spare. There were twenty-seven of us, so we got together quite a lot of stuff. One girl suggested installing cradles suspended from the ceiling for the infants. By the time we were finished we had a first-rate children's carriage fixed up, comfortable and attractive. At the big stations we would bring in hot food. We had the samovar going all the time. After a time we got the guards on a Tashkent train to bring us some wool from the south and we knitted

socks and mitts for our kids. We tried to keep them amused all through the trip, telling them stories, reading to them and singing songs with them. I believe they really did buck up a little, some of them even smiled now and again. But the sight of those little things. . .” Nina broke off. “You know, I don’t think there’s anything more pitiful than a child that has suffered so much it doesn’t know how to smile any more. . . . But where was I? Oh yes, all the guards on other trains followed our example and arranged children’s carriages too. We were very glad to have started something like that. It made us happy,” Nina added.

And as we kept silent, she said in an apologetic tone: “I warned you it wouldn’t be interesting.”

“You’re quite wrong, it is very, very interesting!” Lyuba cried. “That was a wonderful idea you and your friends had, Ninochka!” she added tenderly.

It was very dark outside. According to rest home rules we ought to have been asleep long ago. I gazed into the velvety darkness beyond the window, thinking that I must be sure to tell that story to my class. It is extremely difficult to explain the meaning of true happiness to children of twelve, so hard to make them see that happiness does not consist in personal success, but in living for others and working for others, and not only for oneself.

I found myself mentally sharing with my boys everything that moved or delighted me. At times I would wonder whether I was not becoming too absorbed in my class. But after all, my class was my work and there was nothing more important in my life than that. I was a school-teacher, and that was the nicest thing I could say about myself!

SEPTEMBER

Once again the day arrived which is always marked in red on my calendar: September First. Again I walked down the familiar street. The lime-trees had not lost their pale gold, and only a few dry fallen leaves rustled underfoot.

Everything looked especially bright and clear that morning—the smooth asphalt, the familiar houses, the railings and the cloudless sky, all stood out as vividly as through a freshly washed window on the eve of some spring holiday.

"Marina Nikolayevna! Good morning!" I heard a voice behind me. I turned round and saw Lyosha Ryabinin, leading his little brother Petya by the hand.

"Good morning, Lyosha. Goodness, how you have grown! You're nearly as tall as I am. Why is Petya with you?"

"I'm taking him to school, he's turned seven," Lyosha replied proudly. "He'll be in Natalya Andreyevna's class."

We stood blocking the narrow pavement, smiling at each other. Lyosha had indeed grown. He had the same good-natured, matter-of-fact air of a young man with no nonsense about him. Petya stood wide-eyed beside him, his face freshly washed, his white collar neatly sewn on. His boots shone and his hair had been clipped close according to regulations.

We had hardly moved on down the street when there came a wild whoop from the other side, and Borya Levin, his skin so sunburned that his fair hair looked almost white by contrast, descended upon us.

"Good morning, Marina Nikolayevna! Hullo, Lyosha!"

he cried breathlessly. "If you only knew how I am longing for school. I could hardly wait for today! Have you seen Selivanov yet? He's got a turtle this big!" He spread out his hands so wide that he nearly dropped his satchel. Judging by his gesture the turtle must have been as big as a cart-wheel. "Goryunov brought all sorts of wonderful shells and pebbles back from Artek!"

We walked four abreast taking up the whole pavement, but no one seemed to mind; in fact, I caught many a warm and curious glance in our direction. And Borya talked incessantly. He had so much to tell. I did not interrupt him and tried not to ask any questions; he was so full of exciting impressions that he would not have heard me in any case.

As soon as we stepped inside the school-yard we were literally attacked from all sides. I had hardly time to greet one, when another would appear. Ilyinsky had shot up amazingly, he was almost a head taller than last term. Goryunov had a beautiful tan. As soon as another newcomer from our class appeared he was met with a loud chorus:

"Hurrah, here comes Yura Labutin! Oh, and look, there are the Vorobeikos!"

Seryozha Selivanov, to everyone's delight, appeared in the gateway carrying a large black turtle. Tolya Goryunov had brought quite a collection of pebbles from Artek and an album of drawings. Labutin who had spent the summer in the Caucasus had a large piece of boxwood to show around. Each one was eager to tell the others then and there all that had happened to him in the past three summer months.

"Is this 5-C?" We turned to find a strange boy regarding us gravely. He was as deeply tanned as the other

boys, his hair was light and his thick eyebrows and eyelashes had been bleached by the sun. A pair of dark eyes, like ripe hazel-nuts, contrasted queerly with those light lashes. The boy must have been embarrassed by our inspection, but he endeavoured to appear unconcerned.

"I'm a new boy," he said. "I was sent to you. This is 5-C, isn't it?"

"No, 4-C," said Rumyantsev, then flushed scarlet as a roar of laughter went up.

"You chump! That was last year! We're 5-C now!" the others chorused.

Waiting for the hubbub to subside, the new boy said: "My name is Solovyov."

"That's right, Igor Solovyov, it is on my register," I said. "Welcome to 5-C, Igor."

One of the boys asked him what school he had been to before and why he had transferred. But I was not listening. I had noticed a look of faint concern mingled with pride on Lyosha's face, and I turned to look in the same direction. Not far from where we stood I saw his little brother Petya, a large bouquet of flowers pressed to his chest, standing at the head of a column of twenty pairs of little boys just as neatly dressed, excited and wide-eyed as himself.

Natalya Andreyevna eyed this detachment of hers appraisingly.

"When you approach the entrance take off your caps. Don't forget, now!" she told them.

Petya threw a worried glance in his brother's direction: He wasn't wearing a cap. What was he to do? Lyosha nodded reassuringly.

The little boys moved toward the school steps. They obediently removed their caps and with slow careful steps

climbed the stairs. For a second I forgot my own boys as I watched Natalya Andreyevna. Today she had parted with the boys she had taught for four years. There they were, standing beside their new class mistress. And Natalya Andreyevna was beginning all over again with these seven-year-olds.

"Marina Nikolayevna, the bell's gone," Gai's voice broke into my thoughts.

We climbed up to the third floor and the boys entered the class-room, glancing about them uncertainly.

"Let's take the same places as last year," Ryabinin said. "We can change afterwards."

Vyruchka politely invited the new boy to sit with him and they settled themselves comfortably near the window.

"You are going to have a botany lesson now," I told them. "I am going to 5-A. My first lesson is there. I'll see you again at the third lesson."

It was only then, I believe, that my boys fully realized that they were fifth-formers now. Everything would be different this year. As I was leaving the class-room, Elena Mikhailovna, the botany teacher, appeared in the doorway.

The boys stood up.

I introduced her to the class and left. Nearly all the other teachers were with their classes and it was time for me to be in 5-A. But for a second I paused at the sound of Natalya Andreyevna's voice issuing from behind one of the closed doors:

"Hush now, children! See how quiet it is in school!"

The children stopped talking and listened. It was so quiet that it was hard to believe there were eight hundred boys in the building. . . .

DAY BY DAY

I was a class mistress now, combining my duties in that capacity with teaching Russian and literature to my own and another fifth-form class, 5-A, Natalya Andreyevna's old class. My boys now had different teachers for every subject, but they were not quite accustomed to the new arrangement and they still came to me with all sorts of questions.

When the bell rang at the end of a lesson in 5-A, I would go to my class and the boys hurry off to Natalya Andreyevna—I walking sedately down the corridor as behoves a school-teacher, they racing one another at wild speed and climbing the stairs three steps at a time.

The previous winter, long before the list of pupils for this term's first form was drawn up, before anybody knew what children it would include, Natalya Andreyevna said to her class:

"When autumn comes you will be fifth-formers and I shall be teaching little boys in the first form. Now, I think it would be a nice idea to make some things for them: cut out letters of the alphabet, strips of material to stick them on, and other things like that. Who wants to help me?"

Who could refuse an appeal like that?

And so the boys got busy. They cut out large printed figures from 1 to 20 out of desk calendars and pasted them on stiff pieces of cardboard, one set for every new child. Then they brought along children's calendars for the previous year, selected the nicest pictures, stories and verses, cut them out and framed them. They made about a hundred book-marks, so that the little ones would learn

to take care of their books and not bend the corners of the pages. They cut out little stars, and prepared boxes of coloured crayons, picturing to themselves how delighted the little ones would be when they discovered that even a blackboard could look gay when you wrote on it with red, yellow and blue chalks.

And now all the things they made had come in handy. And whenever Natalya Andreyevna needed anything, she only had to call on her boys from 5-A. They were always willing to help her with her little pupils, to take them to the lunch-room, help them in the cloak-room and even meet them in the mornings and take them to school.

Whenever I had a free hour between classes I would go and sit in with my boys at a botany or history lesson. I liked observing them in this way. And it was gratifying to see how all heads turned in my direction whenever anyone made a good showing. They knew that it meant as much to me as to them.

I had little trouble getting to know the other class, for I knew many of the boys from the previous year. But the main thing was that I had acquired a new confidence in myself—I knew that no matter how uninteresting the subject, I should be able to win their interest and attention. And the boys seemed to be aware of this.

But if I had hoped that henceforth everything would be smooth and plain sailing I soon found that I was mistaken. . . .

FOOTBALL

“Marina Nikolayevna, your boys have run away!”

“Run away! Where to?”

Sofya Alexeyevna, the English teacher, looked quite distraught. This was her first year at school and she was

so taken aback by what had happened that she did not know what to do.

I was due in 5-A for a lesson, but I hurried back with Sofya Alexeyevna to my 5-C. I opened the door and halted on the threshold: the class-room was nearly empty; there were not more than ten boys there.

"Where are the others?"

Silence.

"Lyosha, where have the boys gone?"

Ryabinin bent his head guiltily.

"There's a soccer match on today," he said in a low voice. "Spartak versus Tsedeka*."

"What about it?"

"The match begins at five. But you know how long it takes to get to the Dynamo Stadium when there's a match on. . . . There's always crowds. So they just skipped English. Otherwise they'd be late. . . ."

The next day I came to the class looking as dark as a thunder-cloud. I told the boys that I was ashamed of them, that what they had done showed disrespect for the school, for Sofya Alexeyevna, and for me, their class mistress. I told them that they must apologize to Sofya Alexeyevna, and that they must never let anything like that happen again. Never!

They sat quiet, looking shamefaced and miserable. Gai, on behalf of the whole class, apologized and promised that "it wouldn't happen again".

But though they did not run away from the school to attend soccer matches after that, the situation did not improve very much, for now they spent all their free time playing football in the playground. They played football

* Tsedeka—the Soviet Army team.—*Tr.*

before and after lessons and even during the shortest breaks, and not only on sunny days but in the wettest and muddiest weather. They came dashing into the class-room at the very last moment, flushed, perspiring and breathless, some with bleeding knees, some with black eyes, their minds occupied with far more exciting things than vulgar fractions or irregular verbs.

Loud whispers would be bandied back and forth:

"Some referee you are! Can't do it for nuts!"

"And you call yourself a goalie!"

They would continue the squabbling during the next break, sometimes even coming to blows.

"You're a fine one too!" Sasha Vorobeiko shouted indignantly to Rumyantsev. "A goalie isn't supposed to run all over the field kicking the ball. He's supposed to stick to the goal-posts."

"Well, if you fellows can't score goals, someone else has to," the other shouted back. "You just stand there gaping and let the other side kick the ball into your goal."

"'Course they do, because there's no goal-keeper there to stop them."

There were complaints from parents, complaints from other teachers.

"Your boys think of nothing these days but football, Marina Nikolayevna. There is no discipline in 5-C. Something must be done about it at once."

My cheeks burned as I listened to these reproaches. For I could not deny that they were justified. The whole school, from the first form to the tenth (and some of the teachers too were not altogether blameless), had acquired a passion for football. But my 5-C seemed to be hardest hit by the craze.

I turned in despair to Lyova. My faithful friend and assistant was in the tenth form now and hence released from his duties as Pioneer leader, but he had not deserted us and I continued to seek his advice as before.

"What shall we do?" I asked him. Now, although he wore spectacles and had a distinct preference for chess



himself, Lyova knew very well how much football meant to the boys, and he had a brain-wave.

"We must organize a football team!" he said.

We put it to the boys. What was the fun of kicking a ball about aimlessly, with a different set of players every day and without keeping to the rules of the game? That was not the proper way to learn any game, and football was a serious game, to play it well you had to use your head as well as your legs.

That was a stormy meeting. Of course we would have our own team. We'd organize it right away. Who would be captain? Gai. Half-backs? Ilyinsky or Rummyantsev? And the goalie—that was the most important thing. Who would be goal-keeper?

As soon as everything was arranged we agreed on the following: 1. To play once a week on Wednesdays. 2. To suggest that similar teams be organized in other classes and challenge them to play with us. 3. On all other days but Wednesdays, football was out.

We had one very strict rule: anyone who played football instead of doing his home-work was to be expelled at once from the team. This rule was strictly kept. The two who broke it, Ilyinsky and Vyruchka, were expelled from the team forthwith.

The boys no longer came to class flushed and sweating and there were no more heated arguments about football during lessons.

In the meantime they learned to play quite well. And curiously enough, I was very pleased when 5-C came first in the football contests between the fifth and seventh forms.

The football fever had barely subsided when we found ourselves saddled with a brand-new "epidemic". Nearly every day during break there would be a loud noise like exploding fire-works in the corridor outside my classroom. No one seemed to know where the noise came from. I asked my boys several times, but they refused to enlighten me. The teachers complained that now and again the noise would occur during lessons. Suddenly there would be a loud bang and then all would be silent. The boys would sit looking innocent.

One day I said to the class: "After tomorrow you will not go to the shooting gallery any more. Since you have taken to shooting in school, that will have to do."

The shooting gallery was one of the greatest treats—their drill instructor took them there. They practised shooting and trained for marksmanship contests. To be

deprived of this pleasure was a blow to them. The next day when I entered the class-room the boys stood up as usual, but when I returned their greeting and told them to sit down they remained standing.

"What is the meaning of this?" I asked.

"Marina Nikolayevna!" said Gai. "We promise there won't be any more shooting in school if you give us permission to go to the shooting gallery."

"Very well. But tell me, who did the shooting? I don't want anyone to tell tales, let the guilty one get up and confess."

There followed a few moments of silence, then Volodya Rumyantsev stepped forward.

"I did it," he said.

"But how did you do it?"

The whole class volunteered to explain: "It's easy, Marina Nikolayevna. See this spool here, you just put a little sulphur in the opening, and then..."

I listened carefully to the explanation, twirling the offending spool in my fingers, then I dropped it into my bag. The boys followed it with wistful glances.

OBJECT-LESSON IN TEACHING

"Marina Nikolayevna, do show me that spool you took away from Rumyantsev. I want to find out what makes it shoot." It was Galya, the little girl who lives next door.

"What do you want it for?"

"I want to show it to the girls at school."

"Good gracious, what an idea! How on earth did you manage to get all those ink stains on your nose?"

"I've been doing my arithmetic..."

Galya was a living text-book on teaching for me. She had a different teacher this year—Yevgeniya Pavlovna. I had never met Yevgeniya Pavlovna. Neither had I ever seen Galya's former teacher, yet I had a very clear picture of both of them, not so much from Galya's description as from the miraculous change that had taken place in her attitude to school.

"Hurray, Sunday's over! Sunday's over!" she used to cry gleefully on Monday morning. "I'm going to school!"

How different from last term when she looked forward eagerly all week to Sundays and hated to get up on Monday mornings.

"Just look, Marina Nikolayevna," she said to me. "Last year I got 'threes' all the time, hardly any 'fours'. And now I get only 'fours' and 'fives'."

"Why is that?"

"It's all because of Yevgeniya Pavlovna. She's awfully nice. She worries so much about all of us and is always terribly upset if anyone gets ill. And she smiles such a lot. When we say good-bye to her after lessons she smiles to us all, and she always has enough smiles for everybody!"

"Tanya Syomina, the girl who sits next to me," Galya related on another occasion, "lost her pen and blamed it on to me. I told her to look for it properly instead of blaming other people. But she wouldn't listen. 'You took it and threw it away!' she said. Yevgeniya Pavlovna heard her and got very angry. 'How can you insult your class-mate like that!' she said to her."

I could not help thinking: how unfortunate it was that teachers trained in Moscow should know nothing about such Moscow teachers as, say, our Natalya Andreyevna or Galya's new teacher Yevgeniya Pavlovna. One

can hardly imagine a medical student who did not know the names of our famous surgeons Burdenko or Vishnevsky, a student of architecture who was not familiar with the finest specimens of old and new architecture in Moscow, an art student who had not once visited the State Tretyakov Art Gallery; or a student of a theatrical school who had not made a point of seeing all Moscow's best actors perform. Yet we in our four years at college had missed the opportunity of making the acquaintance of members of our own profession who could have told us more about our future work than all the text-books, and of visiting schools Nos. 110 and 610 where we could have met such famous teachers as Ivan Kuzmich Novikov, Lidia Alexeyevna Pomerantseva and Ivan Ivanovich Zelentsov.

I DISOWN A PUPIL

One of the new-comers to my class was a boy named Lukarev. He had quickly made friends with the others and had grown quite popular in a short time. During break he was always the centre of a noisy laughing group of boys whom he entertained with all sorts of stories and expert imitations of animal noises. At lessons he amused himself by making faces and mimicking his classmates. Sometimes he mimicked the teacher as well. And as he had quite a gift for mimicry, his clowning would raise a titter in the class-room causing him positively to glow with triumph. He himself never laughed; he performed all his antics with a straight face and only rarely would a brief smile flit over his features. He had a large mouth which looked strange in his rather peaked face.

Once during a geography lesson when the teacher was busy with the register, Lukarev, who had been an-

swering at the blackboard, walked back to his seat on his hands. By the time the teacher looked up he was already back on his feet and resuming his seat with an air of quiet triumph. On another occasion, some ten minutes after the morning bell when the class was assembled for the first lesson of the day, we heard the sound of a loud smack outside in the corridor; the next moment the door burst open and a satchel came flying in followed by Lukarev. Lurching, as if he had been pushed violently from behind, he pitched forward on to the floor. We watched, dumbfounded, as he picked himself up with exaggerated difficulty and began pouring out an explanation:

"It wasn't my fault, Marina Nikolayevna," he panted, avoiding my eyes. "I was late. I was standing outside the door wondering what to do, when some big fellow, from the tenth most likely, came past. I didn't touch him but he suddenly reached out and gave me such a wallop that I went flying..."

As he rattled on, I caught a faintly mocking gleam in his eyes which refused to meet mine and I thought to myself: "What a story! Nobody pushed you. You produced all the sound effects yourself." But I couldn't prove it so I told him coldly to sit down, and from the faint smile that touched his very expressive mouth for a mere instant I saw I had not been mistaken. His sensational entry had been a deliberate piece of play-acting.

The next incident featuring Lukarev was rather more serious.

I was giving the class a Russian lesson. Seryozha Selivanov had written a sentence on the blackboard: "As soon as winter comes and the ground is blanketed with snow, you know it will not be long before robin redbreast appears." The boys were copying the sentence into their

books with knowing smiles—for Seryozha's passion for robins was well known.

Reading over what he had written it seemed to me that one of the words had been misspelt and I went closer to the board to make sure. In doing so I obstructed Lukarev's view of the blackboard.

"Stands there like a block of wood and expects you to see what's on the board," he said in a low but perfectly audible voice.

I swung round feeling the blood draining from my face. My hands shook so that I dropped my pencil, and in the silence that had descended on the room it fell to the floor with a loud clatter and rolled away into a corner.

No one said a word. That utter silence horrified me still more. Why was the class so silent? How could they take this outrage so calmly? Lukarev had been with us for a month and a half, long enough to have learned that such behaviour would not be tolerated.

All these thoughts flashed through my head in a few seconds and as swiftly I took my decision.

"Very well," I said. "Until today I was your teacher and you were my pupil. But since you obviously do not respect me I do not consider you my pupil any more."

Fortunately for me the bell went at that point and I hurried out of the class-room.

Anatoli Dmitrievich guessed that something was amiss as soon as I stepped into his office. He gave me a long searching look, then he said gently:

"Now tell me all about it!"

I told him briefly what had happened.

"Natalya Andreyevna had a pupil like that once," he said after a pause. "Loktev, I think his name was. Yes, Loktev. That was in the second form. He also liked to

clown and play the fool. Once he climbed under the desk and declared that he was going to do his lessons there. Natalya Andreyevna laughed at him. 'All right,' she said, 'go ahead if you're more comfortable that way. We'll sit at our desks.' And she went on with the lesson and paid no more attention to him. He soon began to feel very foolish and that did the trick. It was ridicule that brought him around. You see what I'm driving at! Perhaps it would have been better to find some other way of chastising Lukarev, without losing your temper?"

"No," I said, trying to keep my voice steady. "Loktev was only nine years old, Lukarev is twelve. That makes a big difference. And then, besides being a teacher I am a human being, and like any other human being I have a right to be hurt and angry, to feel insulted and indignant. Have I not? It isn't just a matter of Lukarev, it's for my own sake..."

"But you are taking a big risk."

"I know I am."

Anatoli Dmitrievich shook his head.

"Well," he said thoughtfully. "It is too late to do anything about it now. We'll try your method and see what happens. We'll just have to wait and see."

I went to Lukarev's mother and told her what had happened and asked her to make sure that Fedya did his home-work every day. She was much distressed by what he had done.

"What a bad boy he is," she said. "I can't imagine why he does such things. But don't worry. I'll see that he does his lessons. We must make him feel that he has to respect others if he wants to be respected himself."

IN THEIR OWN WORDS...

At first Lukarev tried to behave as if nothing had happened. He ran about during break, shouting and laughing louder than anyone else. Sometimes he would come over to me along with the others, but I ignored him.

I had misjudged my boys in believing that they had taken the affair lightly. When my anger cooled I realized that they had said nothing simply because they had been just as shocked at Lukarev's insolence as I had been. They showed me this now by their behaviour. They did not shun Lukarev completely but they kept him at a distance.

Lukarev was very good at drawing, but he was no longer asked to help with the wall-newspaper, and though he was unquestionably the best chess-player in the class, it was Igor Solovyov and not he who was elected monitor of the class chess circle.

But what hurt Lukarev most was the boys' attitude to his antics. They were no longer amused by his grimaces and his animal noises. He could bark, miaow and crow as much as he liked, no one even glanced in his direction. And when he gave a take-off--and a remarkably good one too--of Lyova short-sightedly examining someone's work, Ryabinin remarked with withering scorn:

"All you can do is imitate people, like a silly monkey."

And instead of making some scathing retort as formerly he would have done, Lukarev pretended not to hear what Ryabinin had said and walked away.

It was about this time that we had begun reading Gorky. The curriculum included only a few excerpts from

Childhood and *My Apprenticeship*, but I felt that this would not satisfy my class. The boys were so fascinated by what they had read, so anxious to learn more about this remarkable person, that we took to staying behind after school and reading *Childhood* aloud.

I remember how much importance Makarenko always attached to the sharing of emotions in building up a well-knit community. Now I saw for myself how true this was. Our collective readings of Gorky, his descriptions of Alyosha Peshkov's grandmother and her wonderful stories, of Tsiganok's dances and Alyosha's discovery of books could not but bring about some subtle change in our relationships.

The boys listened with bated breath to this harrowing account of Alyosha's childhood. There were moments when eyes were suspiciously bright and now and again a heavy sigh would escape someone, or there would be a murmur of protest as someone unwittingly pressed too heavily on his neighbour's shoulder in his excitement. Each one involuntarily sought sympathy and watched to see how the others were reacting to the passages that moved him. And this brought us closer together. We came to understand one another better than before; we exchanged confidences more freely and sought one another's advice. Our little community became more firmly welded.

But Lukarev was not accepted into the community. He sat with us and listened to the story with the others, but he was alone nevertheless.

One of the boys proposed that we meet after lessons to discuss what we had read. Each one would relate some particular incident from the life of Alexei Maximovich Gorky.

"I'll tell about how Alyosha and his grandmother went to the forest and the wolf didn't touch them," Savenkov volunteered.

"I'll tell how Alyosha spent the night in the graveyard!" Ryabinin hastily put in.

"I'll tell about the fire!"

"I'll tell about his grandfather!"

No one asked Lukarev whether he would like to take part in the discussion. A week later we met and the storytelling began. Though they told the story in their own words they tried to keep as close to the text as possible.

"The goldfinches are chirping, the inquisitive titmice are twittering, they must know and touch everything, and one after another they fall into the snare," Seryozha Selivanov related the bird-catching episode from *Childhood*. "A flock of siskins alights on a hawthorn bush," he continued dreamily. "The birds are overjoyed by the sun and they twitter all the more gaily, like a pack of schoolboys. A frugal, thrifty shrike, late for the flight south, sits on a branch of sweet-briar turning a beady black eye in search of quarry. And a bullfinch, red and cocky, perches on an alder bush chirping testily, swinging its black bill up and down."

"And the apothecary used to say this to Alyosha: 'Words, my friend, are like leaves on the tree, and if you want to understand what makes a leaf look the way it does, you have to know how the tree grows—you have to learn! Books, my friend, are like a beautiful garden where everything grows—things that are useful and things that are pleasant to look at,'" Vanya Vyruchka continued the story with spirit.

Sasha Vorobeiko was too excited to keep to the original text:

"And so Alyosha owed the shopkeeper forty-seven kopeks for the book," he related almost breathlessly. "Alyosha begged him to wait and promised to pay as soon as he could, and the shopkeeper held out his hand, puffy and greasy as a pancake, and said: 'Here kiss my hand and I'll wait!' But Alyosha was hot-headed. He picked up a weight and swung it at the shopkeeper!"

Some of them said their piece very well, others gave a less polished performance, but all were equally enthusiastic. Each reacted in his own way to Alyosha's trials and ordeals and it was interesting to see the different gestures and facial expressions of the narrators.

Nearly an hour passed in this way. But when I suggested that perhaps that would be enough for the day, the boys protested vigorously. We continued for another half an hour, and even then they were reluctant to leave. But this time I was firm.

We left the school together. It was a clear bright evening, unusually warm and pleasant for the time of the year. Our footsteps rang out on the hard dry pavements as if inviting us to chase each other down the street. But my boys were still too excited about the literature class to notice anything.

"Best of all I like that bit about Tsiganok dancing!" said Gai.

"I don't even know what I like best. I like all of it," Goryunov said.

"Vorobeiko related that bit about Alyosha and the shopkeeper awfully well, don't you think, Marina Nikolayevna!" Rumyantsev chimed in.

We stopped at the corner, unwilling to disperse, and stood for a long time recalling our favourite passages and regretting that no one had chosen to relate about

Queen Margot, and about Alyosha's introduction to "Ruslan and Ludmilla".

Lukarev had walked with us, but he had not said a word all the way. When we stopped at the corner he stopped too for a moment, then he took off his cap, flung it into the air, put it on again and walked off by himself without saying good-bye to anybody.

I watched him go with a pang. I had been feeling uneasy about him for some time and now this uneasiness had turned to anxiety. "Does he really not care at all?" I wondered. "Doesn't he mind being shut out like this from our lives?"

I knew the boy was capable and bright. He quickly grasped what was required of him by the school programme. But beyond that he was getting nothing. We had all gone to see the film *Childhood*, and had visited the Gorky Museum, both of which had given us endless topics for discussion. Lukarev had been there too, yet he had not been with us. He had been an outsider. But had he felt it?

A gnawing suspicion that I had acted wrongly began to disturb my peace of mind. I found myself thinking of Lukarev all the time. After that Gorky evening he seemed to droop, he was no longer noisy and gay. But I could not tell whether he was really unhappy about what had happened or whether he was just sulking.

The very atmosphere in the class had changed, although outwardly everything was the same. No one spoke of what had happened but it was in everyone's thoughts, as when someone in the family is seriously ill and by tacit agreement the others do not speak of it, although they cannot prevent their thoughts from dwelling on it.

Three days later Anatoli Dmitrievich called me into his office.

"How is the Lukarev affair?" he asked me.

"No change," I replied.

"Do you still think you did right?"

I hesitated. "No, I am not sure now."

Anatoli Dmitrievich paced up and down the room. Presently he stopped by the window and looked out on to the street.

"I am afraid we shall have to transfer him to 5-B, to Elena Mikhailovna's class," he said at last. "You see, you have put yourself in a false position. You told him he was not your pupil any more. He has not apologized. You can't go on like this indefinitely."

Transfer him to another class! I was shocked at the suggestion. Shift my own troubles on to someone else's shoulders? Let someone else correct my mistakes and do my work for me?

"No, no!" I burst out.

"Then what is to be done?" Anatoli Dmitrievich said gently. He paused and added: "Think it over a little more, my dear. I think you will realize that this situation cannot be allowed to drag on too long."

That evening I knocked at a familiar door.

"She's gone out but she will soon be back," said Natalya Andreyevna's neighbour who answered my knock. "She said that if anyone came I was to ask them to wait."

I sat down to wait. How well I had come to know this room—the comfortable couch, the children's photographs on the walls, the bookcase, the large box with the letters from former pupils. That box contained some moving human documents. There were the triangular home-made envelopes that came from the front; there was the little folded note written by a tenth-form pupil

who had dropped in to see his old school-teacher a few minutes before he left for the front; there were the faded sheets of letters written twenty and thirty years ago. . . .

I went over to the desk and began idly leafing through the exercise books lying there. How many books like these had she corrected in forty years! Suddenly I noticed Natalya Andreyevna's own handwriting in one of the books. My eye caught the names—Mitya, Sasha, Volodya. "Had I stumbled on a diary?" As the thought flashed through my head my eyes fell on these words: "... I love them more than life itself". Hastily I closed the book and moved away from the desk. I felt ashamed, as if unwittingly I had chanced upon something sacred and intimate, not intended for prying eyes.

I went out without waiting for Natalya Andreyevna to return. I told the neighbour that my business could wait until the next day when we would meet in school.

As I walked home I thought over my problem. I had failed not because I had taken a different course from that which Natalya Andreyevna had adopted in Loktev's case. That was not the point. We all have our own individuality and each of us acts as he thinks best. Nobody expects artists or musicians to be all alike. A Shishkin painting can always be distinguished from a Kuinji. Then why should teachers be cast in the same mould?

But I had said: "You aren't my pupil any more." Why had I said that? I must always be careful to say exactly what I mean and to abide by my own words. I had told Lukarev that he was not my pupil. But I was wrong! He *was* my pupil. I was responsible for him and there was no evading this responsibility, nor did I wish to, for it was a responsibility I cherished. What was to be done?

Transfer to another class is an ordeal for a school child, it is used by teachers as a punishment for some grave misdemeanour. Lukarev was used to the class, he liked it and he would suffer if he were to be separated from his classmates. I did not want him to suffer.

The next day I was walking down the corridor after lessons when I saw Lukarev standing by the wall, crying.

"Marina Nikolayevna!" Anatoli Dmitrievich who happened to be passing by at that moment, inquired, "is this boy one of your pupils?"

Before I had time to reply, Lukarev cried out in panic:

"Yes, yes, I'm yours! Say I am!" He ran over to me and seized my hand, sobbing: "Marina Nikolayevna, I'm sorry! Punish me any way you like, only please let me be your pupil again!"

So he had been miserable too all this time; he had repented his action. I think he had learned the simple truth about human relationships—you must respect others if you want to be respected yourself. Only then will you be an equal member of the community.

But I too had learned a lesson, one that I shall remember all my life. All my pupils, including Lukarev, whatever their faults, were my responsibility. Lazy or industrious, disobedient or well-behaved, good or bad, they were *my* pupils. I should not forget that.

A DAY IN THE WOODS

One Sunday early in September I went with some fifteen of the boys on a mushrooming excursion, to a country place called Zdravnitsa, not far from Zvenigorod, in the suburbs of Moscow.

It was a beautiful day. The forest was shot through with sunlight and the trees were a shimmering mass of red and gold. There was a deliciously warm mushroomy smell in the air. Here and there the bright red cap of some toadstool stood out among the green. As for the edible varieties we came across whole families of them



in the cool quiet corners of the woods: usually a very big one surrounded by several plump-sided little ones with the tops still pale.

In great excitement the boys came running to me with their finds, their hands grimy with the soil that clung to the roots. Intoxicated by the pure fragrant air they rushed about, chasing one another, climbing trees and pouncing with wild whoops on some stray frog or grass-snake that came their way.

After a while we began to look about for a place to rest and eat our lunch. We chose a pleasant nook under a tall hollow birch-tree. The boys tried very hard to climb

up it to find out "who lived there", but they kept slipping down and soon their sunburned legs were covered with scratches.

They laid out their sandwiches on a newspaper and applied themselves with zest to their food, noisily offering one another sandwiches, cucumbers, tomatoes.

"Why aren't you eating, Trofimov?" someone asked. "I'm not hungry," was the reply. "Not hungry? Funny. I'm simply ravenous. I could eat an ox. Here, have some biscuits." I was talking to Rumyantsev at the moment but I noticed that Trofimov refused the offer of the biscuits and the thought that the boy might be unwell, or perhaps too weary to eat, flashed across my mind.

After a while the boys wandered off again into the woods. I was sitting under the tree resting when to my surprise Trofimov came over to me with a piece of cake and a bar of chocolate.

"Have some, Marina Nikolayevna?"

I looked at him squarely and refused. Slightly abashed, he walked away some distance and began eating by himself.

It was quite late by the time we set out for home. All the way back in the train the boys chattered excitedly of all they had seen and done that day. Suddenly Seryozha said with a sigh:

"I don't know what's the matter with me, I'm hungry again!"

I had a roll in my bag. I took it out and cut it into small pieces and handed it around. The boys refused at first.

"Eat it yourself, Marina Nikolayevna, we're not hungry!" protested Selivanov, the very boy whose cry of distress had stimulated our appetites.

"No," I said firmly, "comrades on the march must share everything. You wouldn't want me to go off into a corner by myself and eat, would you?"

That clinched the matter and each one took his share.

"I think there's nothing nastier than to eat on the quiet, so no one should see," said Rumyantsev, munching thoughtfully.

I glanced at Trofimov and even in the dim flickering light of the carriage I could see that he had turned a fiery red. I looked away, for I saw that the lesson the boys had unwittingly taught him had struck home.

A short time after this incident Trofimov left our school. His family was moving to another town. I gave a great deal of thought to the testimonial I had to give him for his new school. "Vasya Trofimov is a capable boy, equally good at all subjects but particularly interested in arithmetic. He is very well-behaved." All of which was true, but it gave no clue to the child's character. But, after all, what else could I say? That once during an outing he had not shared his food with his comrades but had sat apart and gobbled up a whole bar of chocolate by himself? That would be absurd. Nor had I any grounds for saying that he was unpopular with his classmates, for although he had been in my class for more than a year I knew very little about him. But for that chance excursion in the woods, I might never have discovered how mistaken I had been in him.

Trofimov left us, taking with him my testimonial which will always be on my conscience. I could only hope that his new teacher would be a better judge of character than I was, that he or she would see the faults I had been blind to and help the boy to overcome them and develop the good traits he had in him.

DIMA KIRSANOV

Another of the new boys in our class that year was Dima Kirsanov.

He came from Rostov. His parents had died when he was a baby and he was being brought up by his uncle and aunt, who having no children of their own lavished on him the affection usually reserved for an only child or one that has been delicate from birth. It was enough for Dima to be fifteen minutes late in coming home from school for his aunt, Yevgeniya Viktorovna, to come hurrying over with a worried air to find out what was amiss. If Dima woke up in the morning with a headache he would not be allowed to go to school. He would be kept at home for two or three days, in fact long after his headache or the cause of it had disappeared. Dima no doubt chafed under all this fuss and attention, particularly as some of his classmates—the irrepressible Levin for one—were not averse to dropping broad hints about “sissies” and “molly-coddles” who needed nursemaids to bring them to school and wait to take them home and who most likely were spoon-fed on pap.

Dima paid no heed to these twittings. He behaved as if they did not concern him, which showed a self-possession or indifference to teasing rather surprising in a boy of his age. Whatever it was, it worked, for after a while the boys grew tired of cracking the same jokes and they stopped teasing him.

The other new boys made friends with their classmates the very first day. They soon chose their own special chums, quarrelled with them and made it up again scores of times. But Dima remained aloof. He was an excellent pupil in all subjects, and though he grasped

things quickly, showed none of that carelessness so often the fault of clever pupils. On the contrary, he was extremely conscientious, he did his home-work with scrupulous care, his copy-books were always a model of neatness, and I knew that a single blot was enough for him to rewrite a whole page. Yet whenever I thought about this calm, methodical boy I felt vaguely uneasy. He was so grown-up in his manner that one was apt to forget that he was only twelve. His compositions might have been written by an adult; he even spoke like an adult, using long words and complex sentences with ease. He talked about books he had read or about his classmates with a restraint far beyond his years. He seemed to weigh his words. And he was the only boy in the class who had not taken part in writing the letters to the North.

"I don't think Anatoli Alexandrovich can really be interested in corresponding with us," he remarked on one occasion.

"Why does he write to us then?" Gai asked in genuine surprise.

"Well, once we wrote to him it is only common politeness to reply."

"You're not right," I intervened. "Letters written purely out of politeness are not a bit like the warm, friendly letters Anatoli Alexandrovich sends us."

"I was only saying what I think," Dima replied calmly.

"But why?" Levin demanded heatedly. "What reason have you got?"

"In the first place Anatoli Alexandrovich doesn't know you. What is the point in writing to someone you've never met? And secondly, he is grown-up and you're only kids."

Those were his exact words: "You're only kids."

"And who do you think you are?" Borya cried indignantly. I have no doubt he would have punched Dima's nose had I not been present.

"I don't intend to argue the point," Dima said coldly.

"You don't, eh? What makes you so stuck up I'd like to know?" Borya cried angrily.

That is how Dima got the reputation for being "stuck up", for thinking too much of himself and giving himself airs. None of the other top pupils, like Goryunov, Gai or Levin, had ever been accused of being proud or conceited. Dima Kirsanov was the exception in this respect. And in truth there was a shade of condescension in his attitude to his classmates. At the same time, there was something about him that made it hard to believe that his was merely a case of a swelled head. His eyes were thoughtful and rather sad, and his cutting remarks often lacked conviction. At times I sensed that he was on the verge of tears and I began to suspect that his aloofness must be a sort of defence mechanism. But why did he shun his classmates? What was he afraid of?

One day as I was going home from school, Dima caught up with me outside the gates.

"You're late today, aren't you?" I asked him.

"I wanted to finish my book, so as to be able to return it to the library."

"What are you reading?"

"Andersen's fairy-tales."

"Haven't you ever read them before?" I asked in surprise.

"Oh yes. But I wanted to read 'The Snow Queen' again. I like it very much. I am very fond of fairy-tales in general. You can sometimes learn much more from them than from serious books."

Walking thus side by side along the street, trying to keep in step with each other and avoid the puddles at the same time, it is much easier to talk frankly and without restraint than when you are face to face. At least I have found it so with my pupils, and as Dima and I walked along slowly I felt that here was my chance to ask him a question I had been reluctant to put to him in the rush and bustle of the brief breaks at school.

"Tell me, Dima," I said, "is it my imagination or do you really have no particular friend in school?"

"Yes, it is true," he replied.

"Why is that?"

"Who is there to be friends with?"

I was frankly amazed at his question.

"There are some very nice boys in our class. What about Goryunov?"

"Oh, but he already has a friend. Gai is his chum."

"Must a boy only have one friend?"

"Of course," he replied with a conviction that made my question sound positively absurd.

"I don't agree with you," I said after a pause. "I had a great many friends when I was your age."

"And what about now?" he asked quickly.

"I still have many friends. Besides, Gai isn't only friends with Goryunov, he is just as friendly with Savenkov and Rummyantsev."

"Yes, but in books the hero always has only one friend. Remember, Gerda had Kai, Petya had Gavrik."

"What about Timur? He had many friends, didn't he?"

"Yes, but Zhenya was his best friend," Dima insisted with a certain stubbornness.

"What of it?"

"I wouldn't want to be friends with Goryunov if he liked Gai better than me."

I was a little shocked at this reaction. "What is it? Vanity?" Aloud I asked:

"Didn't you have friends in the school in Rostov?"

"I did have a friend but I was disappointed in him," he replied after a moment's hesitation and in a tone that discouraged me from probing further.

"We have a very good class," I said. "I am sure there are many boys worthy of your friendship. If you are friends with someone you like and admire it should not matter to you whether someone else is closer to him than you are. It's silly to object to his having other friends besides yourself."

"I suppose it is. But I wanted a real friend, a lifetime friend."

We had gone quite a distance out of our way.

"Your aunt will be worried about you," I said. "I'll walk back with you to your house. It is good to have a friend for life," I added. "But I don't understand why only one?"

"You can only have one real friend," he said doggedly.

COMPOSITION

Shortly after that conversation with Kirsanov I gave the class a composition to write at home on the subject of "My Friends".

Those compositions told me a great deal about my boys, about their friendships, the qualities they admired in a comrade and their opinions of one another.

"Borya is my friend," wrote Rumyantsev. "But he isn't easy to get along with because he is very quick-

tempered. He will pick a quarrel for no good reason. Just the same we are very good friends. I admire him because he is honest and straightforward and he will never let a fellow down. I used to be pals with Morozov but he thinks too much of himself. He always tries to be first to solve problems in arithmetic and he gets very annoyed if someone else beats him. I don't like that."

Gai wrote: "Some boys in our class think that Tolya Goryunov is not very brave. That is not true. Here is an example. When he had diphtheria he was given an injection. It was very painful, but Tolya didn't make a sound because his grandad, who is eighty years old and very ill, was in the next room, and Tolya did not want to disturb him. He has read a great many books and he knows quite a lot, but he is always trying to learn more. He is a very good friend and never refuses to help anyone."

I was not surprised to find that a good half of the class had written about Gai, declaring him to be a loyal friend and comrade. But I had certainly not expected that so many of the boys would have written about Sasha Vorobeiko. True, I had noticed that he had become quite popular of late, but the compositions told me many things I had not known.

"Once," wrote Selivanov, "the boys from our yard decided to give me a trouncing. They thought I had taken their football to school but I hadn't done anything of the kind. They waited for me at the corner and pounced on me. Just when things looked bad for me, who should turn up but Sasha Vorobeiko. He rushed right into the thick of the fight and sent everyone flying. If it wasn't for him I would have come out badly. I think that incident shows that my friend Sasha Vorobeiko is a brave chap and always ready to stand up for a pal."

All the boys wrote about two or three of their friends. All but Dima Kirsanov who handed me a slip of paper with the words: "I have no friends" and below that a four-line verse:

*How good it is to have a friend
With whom your leisure time to spend.
But oh how sad to be alone
When your friend is far from home.*

"Did you write that yourself?" I asked him.

"Yes."

"Who is the distant friend? The one in Rostov?"

"No, I didn't mean him. I didn't mean anyone in particular. It's just a verse, that's all."

The next time I saw Dima's aunt, Yevgeniya Viktorovna, I asked her about Dima's Rostov chum and what had happened between them.

"Oh, it is such a sad story," she said. "When Dima was in the fourth form he made friends with a boy named Yura Lebedev. A very nice boy too. My husband and I were so glad, because until then Dima had had no friend and we were afraid he was lonely. Yura was a lively, vivacious boy, the exact opposite of Dima and we liked having him in the house. Everything went fine until one day their teacher asked Dima to read a story out loud in class. While he was reading, Yura began whispering to his neighbour and for some reason he laughed. The story Dima was reading happened to be a very sad one, and Dima was so outraged at his friend's behaviour that he declared he would have nothing more to do with him. And he meant it. We were terribly upset about it, but he is such a stubborn child."

I was amazed at the story. Not because I believe one should forgive one's friends everything—on the contrary, compromise is an unstable foundation for any friendship. But that a boy of twelve could quarrel irrevocably with his best friend simply because he had laughed at the wrong time suggested a degree of severity seldom found in a child.

One day—shortly after the November holidays—I was about to leave the class-room at the end of a lesson when I met Yevgeniya Viktorovna, Dima's aunt, in the doorway. Her eyes were red and her hands shook as she held out a parcel to me. "Dima asked me to give this to you," she said. "They're his library books. Perhaps one of your boys would be kind enough to turn them in to the library."

"But what is the matter with Dima?" I inquired anxiously. (The boys had already crowded around us.)

"Oh, Marina Nikolayevna," she said with a catch in her voice.

"Why don't you come in and sit down," I heard Sasha Vorobeiko's voice behind me.

I took her arm and led her into the room and she sat down on one of the front seats. Dima was ill, she told us. He had lung trouble. They had always been very careful to have him X-rayed regularly once a year, and the last X-ray had shown a spot on his left lung and the professor feared that it was echinococcus. Dima had been taken to hospital and would be under observation there for about three weeks, after which, if the professor's diagnosis proved to be correct, they would have to operate.

"We are terribly worried about him," said his aunt through her tears. "You see, he is so delicate. And he is awfully upset about having to miss school. He doesn't want to be kept back for another year."

"He needn't worry about that. We'll help him," said Goryunov before I had time to say anything.

"But will he be allowed to do his lessons in hospital?" I asked.

"The doctor said that until the operation he might read and study if he wished. But I don't see how it can be managed. I shan't have the time to take him the lessons regularly."

"We'll do it! We'll do it!" chorused the boys.

Yevgeniya Viktorovna looked at them a trifle uncertainly. She was so upset that I believe she had hardly been aware of them until that moment. But she thanked them warmly and, reminding them once again to attend to Dima's library books, she left us.

COPY-BOOKS NOS. 1 AND 2

"I'll go first, of course," Sasha Vorobeiko announced the following morning with an air of finality. "After that, we'll all take turns, in the order in which we sit in class. We'll go every other day. Once a week wouldn't be enough because that would mean he'd have to do fifteen arithmetic problems all at once, not to mention all the stuff he'd have to learn by heart," he added, with a reproachful glance in my direction.

Sasha got Lyosha Ryabinin to issue him two copy-books from the class-room supplies for Kirsanov's homework. "One for him and the other for us, and we'll keep exchanging them. Sec?" Thrifty Lyosha looked at him doubtfully but handed over the required copy-books.

After lessons, the Vorobeiko brothers went off to the hospital. The next day they came to class bursting with news. Firstly, Sasha had actually been in Dima's ward—

which was more than Dima's aunt had been able to do so far, since no visitors were admitted except on regular visiting days. Sasha had not let a trifle like that deter him. When the cloak-room attendant refused to take his coat, he gave it to his brother to hold and slipped past the busy nurses up to the third floor. He hid until the corridor was empty, then darted into Ward No. 12 where Dima lay.

"His eyes nearly popped out of his head when he saw me," Sasha told us, with a chuckle. "He wanted to know how the dickens I'd done it, but I said I'd no time for explanations. I gave him Marina Nikolayevna's note and the home-work, and asked him how he was getting on. He said he was all right, only it was awfully dull with nothing to do all day long, and nothing to read because the hospital only allowed brand-new books and he hadn't any to bring with him. And the other kids in the ward were all much younger than him so he had nobody to talk to. He thanked me for coming and bringing him the lessons, and I told him we were going to come every other day and bring him the home-work so he wouldn't lag behind the rest of the class. I said he could write in pencil if he did it neatly, but he said he would write in ink because he didn't have to lie in bed all day yet and there was a table near the window with an ink-well he could use. We talked for quite a while, and one little kid kept watch by the door so that the nurse wouldn't come in and find me there. All of a sudden we heard someone say: 'No. 12 ward is suspiciously quiet.' The next minute the door opens and in walks the nurse. You ought to have heard the way she yelled at me, and at Dima too. 'I thought you were a clever boy,' she said to him. I told her it wasn't his fault, I had come to visit him, but she wouldn't

listen to me and told me to clear out that minute. She got quite red in the face. I said good-bye to Dima and went out. I wasn't going to stay any longer anyway," Sasha wound up nonchalantly. He was obviously much pleased with himself.

"Is he awfully scared about the operation?" Goryunov asked.

"I hadn't time to ask him. I'll ask him next time I see him," Sasha replied. His tone made it quite clear that notwithstanding his chill reception at the hospital he intended visiting Dima again.

"Rumyantsev will go tomorrow, and Levin on the 14th," he said. "Here, Rumyantsev. This is copy-book No. 2. You'll give it to the attendant and wait until she brings back copy-book No. 1 from Dima. Get it? You can wait downstairs."

"After a while," I ventured, "you can write him a collective letter and ask him about everything."

But my proposal aroused little enthusiasm.

"He wouldn't be interested in getting letters from us. After all, we're only 'kids'," Borya remarked.

"That's a mean thing to say!" Ryabinin retorted.

Just the same no one wrote to Dima that time.

He sent back a tiny note with Rumyantsev, addressed to no one in particular, thanking the class for the lessons. But there was a letter for me in answer to my note. I read it to the class after school.

"Dear Marina Nikolayevna," he wrote. "I am very sorry that I had to go and get ill right in the middle of the term, and I am afraid I shall be laid up for a long time. Hospitals are a nuisance, they are always making all sorts of tests and forever examining you and taking your temperature and making you drink nasty medicines.

But I suppose I shall just have to bear it. I thank you very much for your letter and I am very grateful to Sasha Vorobeiko for coming to see me. He said the boys are going to bring me the lessons regularly, but I doubt whether anything will come of it. It will take up too much of their time. Aunt Zhenya will most likely give you this letter. Greelings to everyone.

"D. Kirsanov."

As far as grammar and punctuation were concerned I had no fault to find with the letter. Yet I was not pleased with it. Once again I found myself wondering about this strange boy. He was not a happy child, but he was destined to be even unhappier unless he changed. Why had he so little faith in his comrades? Why was he so unlike Gai, Goryunov, Ryabinin and the others, who took kindness and generosity for granted and were themselves always ready to do a good turn? "I doubt whether anything will come of it. It will take up too much of their time," he had written.

I am sure that if Levin had been in his place he would have reacted quite differently. He would have had no qualms in asking his classmates to help him. "Please bring me the lessons," he would write, "and be sure to come as often as you can." And everyone would take his request as a matter of course.

* * *

"Dear Dima,

"It wasn't your aunt who gave Marina Nikolayevna your letter, but Rumyantsev. He sent up the copy-book with the lessons and we are going to do it regularly, every other day, as we promised. It won't take much

time at all, because there are forty of us in the class and we can all take turns. We hope that you will be home again by the time Igor Solovyov's turn comes round. Besides the lessons, we are sending you *Two Captains*. It isn't exactly new but it's still in good condition, and the cover is quite clean. Write and let us know what else you need. Regards from all the boys."

The above letter was written by Goryunov and Levin took it to the hospital.

Gradually the job of taking the copy-books to Dima became a matter of routine and no one thought anything about it. Copy-books Nos. 1 and 2 travelled regularly back and forth between the school and the hospital. If one of the boys was unable to go when his turn came round, he told Sasha Vorobeiko about it and Sasha arranged for someone else to go. He handled everything that had to do with Dima and the hospital, and the others obeyed him without a murmur.

"Don't forget to look at the temperature chart," he would remind the boy who happened to be going that day. "It hangs on the wall to the right of the entrance. Look for the surgical department and you'll find his name second from the bottom."

Sasha himself went regularly once a week, and sometimes twice. His brother, his faithful retainer, was always with him. And it will always remain a mystery to the rest of us how it happened that of all those who went to the hospital Sasha alone succeeded now and again in penetrating those sacred precincts—the First Surgical Department—on non-visiting days.

"He's a good lad," one of the attendants, an elderly woman with a strong, serious face and faded blue eyes, said to me about Sasha: "You can trust him. When I tell

him I'll let him in if he only stays for ten minutes, he never stays an instant longer. And he's always so polite and obliging. A nice lad."

Even the doctor approved of Sasha. "He does the patient good," he remarked to me once in passing. "He has a calming effect. Healthy type."

Who would have thought that Sasha Vorobeiko, who had given me so much trouble the year before, would turn out to be such an admirable character? He took everything in his stride with an ease and naturalness that seemed to overcome all difficulties. But perhaps the most remarkable thing about this tough-mannered, sharp-tongued lad with the high forehead and freckled face was his innate tact and gentleness. I could not help remembering that in that almost forgotten incident with the fur cap it was he who had most violently opposed Ilyinsky's suggestion that the fur cap be presented to Savenkov at a class rally. And many a time after that in various circumstances he had shown remarkable judgement. His narrow green eyes still had a mocking gleam in them and his tongue was as sharp as ever, yet he had shown that at heart he was kind and generous.

"You needn't worry about Dima," I heard him tell Yevgeniya Viktorovna. "I saw him, he looks fine and his temperature is normal. He's lonesome for you of course," he added tactfully. "But otherwise he's all right."

Why was it that Sasha, who of all the boys had scarcely exchanged two words with Dima since he first joined our class, had now taken such a jealous interest in everything that concerned this new boy? The answer, I believe, was to be found in Sasha's passionate devotion to his class and his classmates. He was never happy unless he was in the midst of all class activities. He had

been the most eager of all those who corresponded with Nekhoda, he was the greatest admirer of Lyova's talents. As for the dramatics circle, that was his pet hobby—he would have spent all his spare time rehearsing if he could. He brought a tremendous zeal and passion to everything he did, and there was never anything half-hearted about his actions. I feel sure that he attacked that truck-load of apples with the same fervour and enthusiasm he applied to everything. The popularity he had begun to enjoy at school was evidently a source of much pleasure to him, and it was clear that in school he was in his element.

THE OPERATION

Dima's letters became more and more frequent. He no longer addressed them only to me, but to the entire class. Now and again the boys bought him new books and magazines, and copies of *Pionerskaya Pravda* and the *Pioneer* magazine.

In the latter part of November the original diagnosis was confirmed and it was decided to operate on the first Tuesday in December.

We were all very nervous that day. The boys could not give their minds to their lessons and their teachers hadn't the heart to scold them for it. Dima's aunt had been at the hospital since early morning and as soon as lessons were over a good half of the class went over to join her.

We found Yevgeniya Viktorovna sitting on a bench in the waiting-room.

"They are operating now," she said in a whisper when we came over to her. She was too upset to say much and she silently handed me a note from Dima: "Dear Aunt

Zhenya," he wrote. "In half an hour I go to the operating room. You mustn't worry about me. I feel fine. I am sure everything will be all right. Your Dima."

A young nurse in a dazzling white uniform and a cap perched on top of her curls passed through the hall and smiled when she saw the boys. "You must be Kirsanov's classmates," she said. "He's a lucky boy to have so many friends."

"He is being operated on right now," Sasha remarked sternly.

"Oh, I see," the nurse said and with a sympathetic glance at us she disappeared, leaving us there to wait—to wait until we lost all sense of time. The lines of Yevgeniya Viktorovna's face deepened. The boys sat with tense drawn faces glancing from Dima's aunt to me, and I felt an unreasonable fear mounting within me. After all the boy was very delicate and the operation was a serious one. Why was it taking so long?

Some time after four, the doctor on duty came down and hurried over to where Dima's aunt was sitting.

"The operation is just over. Everything went very well. There's nothing to worry about," he said quickly, knowing how anxiously these words had been awaited.

Dima's aunt turned paler still, but the boys set up such a cheer that the doctor drove them out of the hospital without more ado.

Yevgeniya Viktorovna did not want to leave the hospital, and we had a hard time persuading her to let us take her home. We assured her she could telephone the hospital at any moment and find out how Dima was faring.

"Do you think she stayed at home?" Sasha told us the next morning. "She went back to the hospital right away and sat there until late that night."

"How do you know?"

"I was with her," Sasha said casually, adding with pride: "Dima's a regular hero. The doctor said he wasn't the least bit afraid. His temperature is normal already," he went on. "We won't bother him with lessons for a while yet."

But the boys continued going to the hospital to take him notes and inquire after his temperature and general condition. Sasha contrived to drop in at the hospital before school, and he came to lessons with all the latest news.

Ten days after the operation Dima was allowed to go home. The day after he returned, his aunt came to school. She looked worn out but her eyes shone with happiness.

"We are so glad that everything ended so well," she said. "Marina Nikolayevna, would you care to come and see us? Perhaps some of the boys would like to come too? Dima wants so much to see you all."

That evening we went to visit Dima—the Vorobeiko brothers, Goryunov and I.

He was lying propped up among his pillows, very pale and thin. His eyes seemed to have grown very large and he looked at us questioningly. We sat down by his bed.

"I'm so glad you have come," said Dima.

"Not so glad as we are to see you," Sasha replied. "Here's a letter for you from Gai. And this one's from Ryabinin. Borya sent this book. It's a good one, *My Dear Boys* it's called. I think you'll like it. All the fellows wanted to come and see you, but I told them there wouldn't be room for them all at once."

"I must be miles behind the rest of you," Dima said

with a worried note in his voice. "What are you learning now? I haven't looked at a book for ten days."

"Don't worry, Dima," I assured him. "We are only revising just now, and the winter holidays begin soon. You will easily catch up with us."



Sasha kept up a constant flow of chatter, not because he was afraid of awkward silences, but because he felt it his duty to entertain the others. He gave Dima all the school news.

"You ought to see the shelf Ilyinsky made! It was a scream! Lyova said he was afraid it wouldn't be able to hold any books, so Ilyinsky suggested hanging it at an angle. Levin's got a wonderful new stamp, Morozov was green with envy when he saw it. He wants to swap with him, but Levin won't hear of it. He's right, why should he give away a rare stamp? But that Morozov is such a grabber, he wants everything for himself. If I were Borya I'd give him a stamp he'd remember all his life! Selivanov wanted to send you a pigeon for a present but we

persuaded him not to. What would you do with a pigeon? You've got to lie still and get well. . . ."

Dima spoke little and when he did it was with difficulty. I saw that he was tired, and tried to cut the visit short, but he didn't want to let us go. "Stay just a little while longer," he begged.

But finally I rose and looked meaningly at the boys. They took the hint.

"You'll come again soon, won't you?" Dima said. "Please give my love to all the others. There are one or two exercise books I brought back from the hospital, Marina Nikolayevna. Would you mind looking them over?"

I took the exercise books and we said good-bye.

THE GRAMMAR LESSON

At home I looked over the exercise books and marvelled once again to see how neatly and painstakingly the grammar and arithmetic home-work had been done.

With genuine pleasure I wrote the highest mark, a "five", on the exercise book in my own subject, and gave the other to Lidia Ignatyevna, who taught arithmetic to my class.

I watched her as she turned the pages, quickly at first, then gradually more slowly and attentively as her amazement grew. "Remarkable!" she exclaimed. "When did you say he was operated on? The sixth? Look, this exercise is dated the fifth. Yes, that Kirsanov is a remarkable child, and unusually intelligent. . . ."

I agreed with her.

Dima's recovery coincided with a busy time for us. The second quarter was drawing to a close and there

were frequent tests; moreover the winter holidays with New Year's and fir-tree parties were coming. Everyone was in the gayest spirits; the days sped merrily by, and it seemed that all troubles and cares had been left behind.

The boys continued to visit Dima regularly every three or four days. One day Boris said to me:

"Kirsanov isn't a bad fellow after all. He isn't a bit stuck up really. He's just made like that. He *is* a queer chap, isn't he, Marina Nikolayevna?"

I was glad that even Boris, who had disliked Dima more than the others did, had learned that it is wrong to judge people hastily and that some natures are more complex than others.

On New Year's eve I went to see Dima again. The doctor had allowed him to get up and he was already doing his lessons. His aunt was worried; she feared that he was overtaxing his strength. "You simply can't tear him away from his books," she said. "I'm so afraid it is bad for him to spend so much time studying!"

As Dima rose to meet me I was conscious of a change in him. The strained look was gone and he appeared to be softer, gentler, as if something had melted in him.

"How are you?" I asked him.

"Very well, thank you. Only I am rather tired of staying at home."

"Longing to be back?"

"Yes, at school and with the boys. . . ."

"Well, as soon as the holidays are over you'll be with us again. The whole class is looking forward to your return."

"Are they really?" and a shy, happy smile I had never seen before lit up his face.

On January 11 Dima came back to school. And when I entered the class-room that morning some minutes before the bell rang there was Dima surrounded by a crowd of happy excited youngsters, their beaming faces turned eagerly toward him.

"You must be very gentle with him," I said. "Don't forget he is still very delicate. And now sit down, everybody, I have a New Year's present for you."

"Oo! A present! What is it?"

"Guess!"

"A brand-new dictation," Goryunov hazarded with a mischievous grin.

"I know!" cried Boris. "It's a letter."

"Boris is right. Now let me read it to you. 'My dear friends! Thank you very, very much for your letters and the invitation to come and see you in Moscow. I am looking forward to paying you a visit, and letting you show me your school, your class and, of course, Moscow. I want to see everything there is to see in Moscow. But most of all I want to see you all. Please write soon and let me know how Dima Kirsanov is getting on. I am rather worried about him.'"

At these words everyone turned to look at Dima who raised his eyebrows in surprise and then suddenly turned a fiery red.

After I had read Anatoli Alexandrovich's letter to the end I began the lesson. It was grammar. We were going over verbal conjugations and shortly before the bell rang I set the class an exercise. I told them to write three sentences using the past, present and future tenses. While they wrote I walked up and down the aisles, glancing now and again at their exercise books as I passed.

"Today I shall write a letter to Dolgaya Guba," wrote Dima Kirsanov. "We received a letter from our friend in the Far North," wrote Gai. "I had a wonderful time during the holidays," I read in Selivanov's book. "Our New Year's tree is still standing in the living-room," wrote Vorobeiko junior, and despite his obvious efforts to write neatly, a big blot somehow planted itself on the last "m". And as I moved from desk to desk looking into these exercise books with the familiar handwriting, some lines written by my favourite author, Maxim Gorky, came to my mind:

"The human soul reflects as in a fragment of glass some tiny particle of the whole, in every human being is hidden a little bell—one need only know how to reach it and it will respond, faintly perhaps, but warmly."

As in everything Gorky wrote, there is much wisdom, humanity and truth in these words.

TRIP TO BOLSHEVO

"Guess who's come!" I heard Lyosha Ryabinin's glad cry one afternoon after lessons.

The last bell had just gone and Lyosha, who sat nearest to the door and was therefore the first to open it, sighted the guest outside in the corridor before anyone else. I was too busy making entries in my register to see who it was, until the unusual hubbub caused me to look up. Who should I see in the doorway but Shura.

"It's just like you to drop in on us like this without warning," I said, as we shook hands.

"It's much nicer when you don't expect it," Boris averred.

"I think so too," Shura agreed.

"Are you going to be here long?" the boys wanted to know. "Will you come to see us again? We have so much to show you!"

"I shall come tomorrow. You promised to show me your stamps," he said to Kira. "I want to see Anatoli Alexandrovich's letters too. I suppose you keep them in that cupboard of yours, Lyosha?"

"Would you like to see them now?" Lyosha asked, moving toward the cupboard.

"No, not just now. I came here straight from the train. But tomorrow you can expect me. I'll be here promptly at half past two."

We said good-bye to the boys and went out. The streets were covered with a fresh layer of fluffy snow.

"Well, have you come for more copy for an article?" I taunted.

Shura was so surprised at my tone that he actually stopped in his tracks.

"You're not angry with me, are you? My dear girl, I never thought you would take it like that! Think of all the new friends you have made! You sounded quite enthusiastic about it in your letters."

"I know," I assured him. "I'm only joking. When you stopped writing I was sure you'd turn up before long. How long are you staying this time?"

"About ten days. I have brought a whole page of copy for the paper. Pretty good stuff too, I think. It was your boys again who gave me the idea."

"My boys?"

"Yes, it occurred to me when I was looking over your exhibition last year—the one about the boys from your school who had distinguished themselves in the army—that it might be a good idea to take a graduating class,

say the one that finished just before the war broke out, and see what its members are doing now. Nearly six years have passed since then. Wouldn't it be interesting to find out what has happened to those boys and girls who left school to start life on their own on the eve of the war?"

"Yes, I think it would be very interesting. But how could you find them all?"

"I'll show you when we get home." He fell silent and I could see by his face that his thoughts were far away.

"I have another job to do here," he said after a pause. "A friend of mine who lost his little son during the war received word recently that the boy is in a children's home near Moscow. Since my friend is unable to come to Moscow just now, he asked me to locate the boy and take him back with me. Think of it! He has been searching for the child for years, he lost all hope of ever finding him, and now it turns out that he is safe and sound in a home in Bolshevo. Isn't that wonderful!"

* * *

Shura came to school the following day as he had promised. He told the boys all about the trip he had made to Pokrovskoye to deliver the books we had sent for the village school library. He told them about his travels in the Ukraine and also about his friend who had just found the little son he had lost six years ago. Of course they wanted to know all about the little boy and how he came to get lost. It turned out that the father had been in the army and the mother had been killed in an air raid. The little boy was only two at the time and all he could tell his rescuers was that his name was Vova Sinitsin and that his mother was called Marusya. That

and a photograph of himself taken, evidently, with his parents, was all there was to go by.

The manager of the children's home to which Vova Sinitsin was finally traced had written the following letter to the child's father.

"Dear Comrade Sinitsin, I think there can be no doubt that the boy we have here is your missing son. He was picked up near Pskov in 1942. He said his name was Vova and his mother was called Marusya. I cannot send you the photograph of Vova and his parents (the boy is on his father's knee and the mother is standing on his left wearing a white blouse and a tie), because it is the boy's only proof of identity. But I shall have a copy made and send it to you as soon as possible. The best thing, of course, would be for you to come here yourself. The boy has blue eyes and light hair, and a small birth mark on the left side of his upper lip. I am sending you a picture of him taken recently, but as he is eight years old now, I doubt whether you will be able to find any resemblance to the baby of two you remember. We are looking forward to seeing you soon.

"L. Zalesskaya."

Shura passed the letter around. Then he took out a photograph of a smiling man in a dark suit holding a chubby baby on his knee; beside him stood a woman wearing a white blouse with a tie.

"So the manager did send the photo after all?" Boris asked.

"No. Grigori Alexeyevich happened to have another one. He asked me to take it with me to compare with the photo in the children's home."

"When are you going there?" asked Goryunov.

"The day after tomorrow."

"May we go with you!" several voices piped up at once.

"We have a ski outing that day," Ilyinsky reminded them.

"What about it? We'll take our skis along. We can go to Bolshevo by train and ski the rest of the way. Do take us, please!"

Shura glanced questioninglly at me.

"Marina Nikolayevna says 'yes!'" they shouted before I had time to say a word.

... When we got off the train at Bolshevo, Dima Kirsanov, Kira Glazkov, Fedya Lukarev and I stayed behind to wait for the local train, the "cuckoo" train as it was called. Dima was not allowed to ski after his operation, Kira had no skis and Fedya had contrived to break one of his on the way and he watched, black as a thundercloud, as the others went off with Shura through the woods.

"Suppose that boy isn't the real Vova Sinitsin after all," Dima said in a worried tone.

"He's real just the same," Kira objected.

But Dima was evidently troubled by doubt. He was silent all the way, looking out of the window impatiently for our station to appear.

The "cuckoo" soon brought us to our destination. We climbed out and followed the road across the field and through a white and silent wood where we floundered up to our knees in the fresh snow. Presently through the trees we caught sight of a wooden summer-house, and farther back a large white house surrounded by a tall fence from behind which came the shouts and laughter of children at play. We knew that this must be the place.

Since the others had not arrived yet, we went for a walk in the woods. Dima was silent as before, but Fedya had got over the tragedy of his broken ski and was his lively self again. He and Kira were excellent company. I did not know what road Shura had taken and how long it would take them to get here, and so to while away the time and keep warm, we made a snow-man. We made the eyes, nose and mouth out of pine cones and something like a helmet out of fir branches, and with Fedya's surviving ski in his hand he looked like a professional skier.

At last we caught sight of the familiar figures among the trees, and soon the woods were echoing to the sound of lusty voices that could only belong to Borya Levin and Sasha Vorobeiko. Those two were physically incapable of modulating their voices. Even in class they shouted their answers as if they were addressing an open-air meeting.

Our fifteen skiers came up in regulation single file, two or three metres apart—a most imposing sight. Shura was in the lead and Lyosha Ryabinin as usual in the rear. We waved to them and they sped over to us, their cheeks rosy, their eyes sparkling. Labutin at once opened his first-aid kit and proceeded to examine everybody in turn in the hope of finding someone to doctor.

It was amusing to hear him trying to persuade Gai whose face was as red as a ripe pippin that his cheek was frost-bitten.

“Oh look, Boris' ears are white!”

“What do you expect them to be? Green?” Borya retorted.

“White means frost-bitten! You'd better let me massage them for you and put some ointment on.”

“Go and massage yourself!”

All Labutin's efforts to make use of his vaseline supply and to display his talents as a *masseur* were in vain; there was not a single frost-bite among us.

"Now," said Shura, "since they can't possibly allow all of us into the place at once—they have to be careful



about infections and such things—you wait here and I'll go and look up the manager."

Shura opened the gate and through the palings we saw him walk over to the entrance and ring the bell. The door opened and he went in. By now the boys were simply burning with impatience. I tried to distract their attention by asking them about their ski trip from the station and telling them about our ride in the "cuckoo" train and the snow-man we had made. But nothing helped.

At last the door opened again and Shura reappeared, accompanied by a tall elderly woman with a coat thrown over her shoulders. We tried to tell by their faces what

answer Shura had been given, but they strolled along the path slowly, engrossed in conversation, and paid no heed to us. Rumyantsev and Vorobeiko, unable to stand the strain, made a dash for the gate, the others after them.

"Alexander Iosifovich!" they shouted to Shura. "Is it him?"

Shura stopped and held up two photographs identical in every respect except that one was more faded than the other. It was the photo of the young woman in the white blouse and the man with the little boy on his lap.

"Hurray!" shouted Gai, and the others joined the cheer. They threw their caps up into the air and raised a terrific din, which subsided into an awkward silence when the woman, in a tone of faint reproof, said "Good afternoon, boys," reminding us that in our excitement we had forgotten our manners, forgotten everything but the fact that Vova Simitsin had found his family and that Shura was going to take him home to his father.

I apologized for the boys and myself, and Shura introduced us to Ludmilla Ivanovna Zaleskaya, the matron of the children's home. By this time clusters of round faces and inquisitive noses were pressed to the window-panes of the white house.

"You must come inside and have some nice hot tea," Ludmilla Ivanovna invited.

"What about infections and such things?" inquired Labutin.

Ludmilla Ivanovna looked at him gravely, noting the first-aid kit slung over his shoulder.

"We'll just have to take a chance," she said. "I can't very well leave you out in the cold, can I?"

"Quite right," Vorobeiko said in a loud whisper. "Besides all our microbes must be frozen stiff by now."

"I shall introduce you to Vova," said the matron as she led the way into the house. "But please don't tell him anything yet, or you will upset him. I shall talk to him later on."

The boys carefully dried their skis and stood them up in the hallway; they took off their coats and piled them on a wide bench and followed the matron into a large pleasant room.

On a chair in the middle of the room stood a youngster of about five with a bulging forehead and fair eyebrows. "Quick! Quick! Listen before I forget!" he was shouting at the top of his voice.

The children grouped around him were of various ages, some younger, some older, but none over ten. The little boy on the chair opened his mouth and was about to begin reciting something when he caught sight of us, jumped off the chair and ran up to us. The next moment we were in the centre of an excited group, and soon my boys were making friends with the children.

"What were you going to recite?" I asked the little boy whose performance we had interrupted. He did not need much coaxing. With forehead puckered, eyes popping out with excitement and lips amusingly rounded, he recited the verse he had just composed. It was as jolly as its author:

*"When winter comes
We have such fun.
We slide and skate
The whole day long.*

"And here's another one:

*"Down the road comes the motor car.
Its lights are so bright
We can see on the darkest night.*

"And now listen to this one:

*"Who's that walking in the woods?
Why, it's Bruin.
What's he doing?
Stealing honey.
Isn't he funny?"*

The children, my boys included, rewarded the poet with a good round of applause, and without pausing to catch his breath he cried out: "Now here's a riddle for you: It's not a boy but its name is Teddy, it lives in the forest and steals honey."

"Some riddle," said Solovyov. "It's a bear of course."

The little boy was put out.

"Ass!" Ryabinin hissed in Solovyov's ear. "Come on," he said to the little boy. "Let's have another one."

A whole chorus of voices answered him; it was clear that there was no shortage of riddles here. But again the "poet" was ahead of the rest.

"It's sly, it's red, and it steals chickens—what is it?"
Now what could it be?

"A squirrel," piped up the tactful Lyosha to the amazement of his classmates.

The children were delighted. "Wrong! Wrong! Whoever heard of a squirrel stealing chickens? Squirrels are littler than chickens."

"A goat then?" Lyosha offered.

Again the room rocked with merriment. Solovyov, unable to stand the strain, blurted out: "A fox!"

"Try and guess this one," said a little dark-haired girl. "It's got four legs, two backs and you sleep on it."

By now we had learned how to react.

"It couldn't be a sofa, could it?" Shura ventured.

"A bench perhaps?" was Savenkov's guess.

"Wrong again. It's a bed!" declared the little girl triumphantly.

By the time Ludmilla Ivanovna returned we felt quite at home. But one riddle still remained unsolved for us—which of these chubby, bright-eyed children was Vova Sinitsin?

"Let's get acquainted," said Ludmilla Ivanovna. "This is Yegor Varenichev (the budding poet gave a little bow), this is Valya Smirnova (she pointed to the dark-haired little girl), this is Vova Sinitsin, Pavlik Volkov. . ."

She introduced us to all the children in turn but we had eyes only for the sturdy, blue-eyed youngster who was regarding us with evident curiosity.

"Of course," Vorobeiko whispered to me. "See that birth mark over his lip? I ought to have recognized him at once. He's just like the boy in the photo."

I was tremendously interested in observing my boys in these new surroundings. Vastly amused, I watched Tolya Goryunov and a tiny little girl who kept tagging after him and calling: "Boy, boy!"

"Well, what is it?" he answered at last.

"I know how to write the letter 'y'," she said shyly.

Tolya was obviously at a loss to know what to say. On the other hand, Glazkov, Selivanov and Savenkov who had little brothers and sisters of their own at home, Lyosha Ryabinin, who was bringing up his two little

brothers practically on his own, and many of the others felt quite at home with the children. As for Dima, Sasha Gai, the two Vorobeikos and Borya Levin, they could not take their eyes off Vova. I saw them go up to him and I listened to the conversation that followed:

Dima: "Do you like it here?"

Vova: "Very much."

Borya: "Would you mind if you had to go away from here?"

Vova (puzzled): "Why should I go away?"

At that point Shura came over, sat down on a bench and drew Vova toward him. The child was a little puzzled but he behaved as simply and naturally as before.

"Are you their teacher?" he asked Shura.

"No, I am only a friend who visits them sometimes. And now I've come with them to visit you."

"Do you like our home?"

... After a while we had tea. There were far more hosts than guests at the table, and since each of the children wanted to sit next to one of us it was some time before we were finally settled.

Each one was served a plate of steaming potatoes, for which we were very grateful since we all—skiers and non-skiers alike—had developed quite an appetite by now.

The meal over, we rested awhile, and began to prepare for the trip home. Dusk was gathering and it was time to be getting back. The boys reluctantly put on their coats and collected their skis. The children saw us to the door.

"Good-bye! Good-bye! Come and see us again!" they called to us as we trooped down the path into the woods.

Before long we were in the little "cuckoo" train again, changing at Bolshevo for the Moscow train. The tall silhouettes of pine-trees flashed by dimly in the dark, and the measured beat of the wheels made us drowsy. The boys were quiet. Like myself they were deeply moved by what they had seen. They had witnessed a human tragedy come to a happy end—little Vova had found his father.

"It's just like in a book," Boris Levin said with a sigh.

"Alexander Iosifovich," Dima asked suddenly. "What if this Vova Sinitsin had not turned out to be your friend's son?"

"My friend told me to bring him back in any case. He was going to adopt him," replied Shura.

STAMP-COLLECTORS

The next day the boys could talk of nothing but the trip to the children's home. Those who had not gone with us showered us with questions. "What is Vova like?" "Does he know his father's been found?" "Are there lots of children in the home?" "When is Alexander Iosifovich going there again?" "Could I go with him next time?" "Me too!" "And I?" "Oh, why did I have to go to the pictures yesterday!" "Whatever made me go skating instead of going to Bolshevo with you."

Those who had not been with us bitterly regretted it. Even Morozov was put out. But he didn't mind too much. He had brought his stamp album. He had overheard Shura talking to Kira about stamps and had decided to exhibit his own collection.

I noticed that Kira too had his album. It lay neatly wrapped up on his desk.

"Come on, open it up and let's have a look at it," Boris urged him at every break.

But Kira shook his head. The boys had seen his collection dozens of times, but this was a very important occasion and he refused to be drawn. No one asked Morozov to show his, for everyone knew that nothing could persuade him to reveal his treasures before the appointed time.

Glazkov and Morozov kept glancing furtively at each other. The impatience of the class mounted hourly. Toward the end of the last lesson I began to tremble for fear something might prevent Shura from coming. But fortunately he turned up promptly just as the bell sounded.

"Glazkov's brought his stamps! And so has Morozov!" Boris shouted to him in greeting.

Morozov's collection was inspected first. It began with the stamps of the Tuva Republic—square, triangular and rectangular—blue, green, red and brown. They bore some remarkably beautiful miniature landscapes: fir-trees finely etched against a background of snow-capped mountains; lakes framed in hills. And animals of all kinds—squirrels with great bushy tails; a marten, its supple wiry body poised for the leap; a pouting camel; an enormous bull with wicked-looking horns; a shaggy bear who seemed to be making straight for us. Some of the stamps depicted scenes from Tuva life: warriors and hunters galloping wildly on horseback; a hunter lassoing a tremendous elk with wavy horns; a fisherman with his knee pressed against the side of his boat, knifing a great fish whose head is seen above the water; another

hunter spearing a bear; an archer with his bow bent as far as it could go; a caravan of camels in the desert; a rug-weaver working on a huge carpet; an aeroplane with shining wings soaring in the sky. The daily life and labours of a whole people were recorded in these coloured bits of paper with the neatly perforated edges.

"Aren't they lovely! Look at that wonderful horse! It seems to be flying in the air!" cried the boys.

Then came the foreign stamps with portraits of kings and dukes, queer plants, animals, designs. The Liberian stamps had a picture of a cocoanut palm, and there were palm groves on the Togo stamps. For Mozambique, an orange-tree, and for Borneo, an orang-utan, a crocodile and a peacock, for Nyasaland, a giraffe. And more elephants, snakes, antelopes. A veritable rainbow of colour.

Morozov carefully turned the pages of his beloved album, now and again interjecting a brief explanatory remark, such as:

"In 1854 Western Australia issued a stamp with a wild swan on it. This is a Chinese pagoda. That's an Egyptian pyramid. In 1868 the Orange Free State..."

"Orange Free State," interrupted Shura. "Where is that?"

Before Morozov had time to reply Goryunov had rushed to the map, knocking over someone's satchel in his haste.

"In Africa," he cried. "In the south." Then ashamed of his sudden outburst, he wound up in a low voice: "On the border of the Transvaal."

"And where are Tonga Islands, who can tell me?" Shura asked. "Ah, here is a bread-tree, can anyone tell us something about it?"

"I can!" cried Boris. "Its fruit is soft and pulpy inside;

they wrap it in leaves and bake it and it tastes something like our bread. The bark gives off a sticky juice which is used to trap birds. Coconut palm leaves are also used for food, like vegetables. The fibre goes for matting and rope. It is very strong."

"You do know a lot of interesting things," Shura remarked approvingly, then turned to Morozov whose face I noticed had clouded slightly at hearing someone else praised.

"You have a very interesting collection. Very intelligently arranged too. What Soviet stamps have you apart from the Tuva Republic?"

"Only a few, I've just started collecting them."

"Glazkov collects Soviet stamps only," Ryabinin announced proudly.

KIRA'S ALBUM

On learning the previous year that there were three ardent stamp-collectors in my class I had hunted up some books on the subject and studied them carefully. One thing the authors all agreed upon was that stamp-collecting teaches children to be tidy, attentive, systematic and orderly, besides inculcating various other excellent qualities. I am sorry to say that none of this appeared to apply in any way to Kira Glazkov. He was unusually absent-minded for a boy of his age. His exercise books were a mass of blots and mistakes. True, his stamp albums were an exception in this respect—they were a model of neatness. He would not let anyone touch a stamp with his fingers, he himself used tweezers for this purpose, and he handled the solid heavy pages of the album as if they were liable to fall apart at the slightest touch.

Now Kira had taken Andrei Morozov's place at my table and with his brows knitted in a frown of concentration he opened his collection.

"I collect Russian and Soviet stamps," he began, turning the first page in his album. It contained four rows of small square brown stamps with a white eagle in the centre.

"Why, they're all alike," Vyruchka remarked with disappointment.

"They are nothing of the kind!" Kira retorted hotly. "Look at them carefully. See, these are perforated and those aren't. The perforation on this one is smaller than on that one. They're all different. Look, here's one with a round postmark and the one next to it has a square one. Do you see postmarks like that nowadays? Look at the postmark on this one—see, it's all dotted. And here's a row without any postmarks at all. A fat lot you understand if you can say they're all alike."

There was so much scorn in Kira's voice that Vanya was quite crushed. Shura's eyes twinkled.

Kira turned over the pages. There were stamps issued in honour of the tricentenary of the Romanov dynasty, and issues commemorating the Russo-Japanese war.

"Oh look, those are our Soviet stamps!" Rumyantsev shouted, as Kira turned a page revealing a series of stamps of an entirely different character. Soviet stamps. For the first time in the history of philately the ordinary workingman, peasant and soldier appeared on the postage stamp. A sinewy arm holding a sword smashing a chain. Smolny, in the heroic days of October 1917. A worker vanquishing a dragon. From year to year the stamps grew more colourful and beautiful, and the variety increased. Like tiny coloured stills of some great news-reel

they traced the history of our country, the hard but glorious path traversed by its people.

The boys viewed them with awe.

"That's my favourite picture of Lenin. The one where he is smiling a little with his eyes screwed up."

"Here's one of Lenin as a baby of three."

"Look, that's the tenth anniversary of the Red Army issue. An infantryman, a sailor, a cavalryman and an airman—a stamp for every branch of the service."

"And there's the First All-Union Pioneer Meet," cried Gai. "Look, more Pioneer stamps!"

"I have a whole Pioneer series further on," said Kira. "We'll get to them soon. This is the famous battleship *Potemkin*. And here are the barricades in Moscow in 1905. The one with the red flag shows the Krasnaya Presnya District."

"Oh, look at that wonderful airship! That was when they first began building them here."

"There's Maxim Gorky!"

"Yes, that stamp came out in 1932 in honour of the fortieth anniversary of his literary career."

"Oh, what smashing stamps! What's this one, Kira?"

"This is an ethnographical series," Kira replied grandly. "I've got all the peoples of the U.S.S.R. here. By republics. Here's Uzbekistan. See those buildings, just like the houses on Gorky Street in Moscow. This red one is Turkmenia. They pick the cotton, and haul it by camel and motor lorry to the mills."

Each new page elicited more excited comments. There were stamps with portraits of the great men of the Revolution—Frunze, Kirov, Dzerzhinsky; heroes of the stratosphere; Ivan Fyodorov, the first Russian printer; the great writers—Tolstoy, Pushkin, Chekhov and Mayakovsky.

The series dedicated to the famous Chelyuskin Arctic expedition, the Papanin expedition, and the heroic Arctic aviators, aroused universal admiration, as did the series on the Moscow Metro, the sports series, the lovely air-mail stamps, stamps in honour of the 20th anniversary of the Red Army, showing Stalin greeting the First Cavalry Army.

Impressive too were the anti-war stamps issued in 1934, showing fascist bombs raining down from a dark sky pierced by jagged flashes of lightning; mothers with frightened children fleeing from blazing houses.

Then came more skiers and sprinters, magnificent views of the Caucasus and the Crimea, the underground palaces of the Moscow Metro and other splendid new buildings in the capital, the All-Union Agricultural Exhibition. The smiling faces of men and women, happy and proud of their work, looked out at us from the small coloured squares of paper.

And at last we came to more recent days and events even my boys remembered—the war, the victory, the beginning of peacetime construction.

Kira went on turning the pages of his album, giving more and more animated explanations as he went along.

"How do you know all these things?" Labutin finally asked him.

"Whenever I get a new stamp I find out all about it. If it has a portrait of some celebrated person on it I try to get a book or article about him," Kira explained.

"That's a splendid collection you have, Kira," Shura said. "A priceless collection, I would say. Every stamp is a story in itself. Yes, stamp-collecting is a wonderful hobby. Not if you just buy stamps to stick them on, but if you learn something from them, as you do."

"Do you collect stamps?"

"I used to. When Marina Nikolayevna and I went to school I had a collection, but it was lost during the war. Hold on, Kira! I believe I have just the thing for you. It is one of the few stamps I have kept. It will be just right for your collection—you haven't got one like it. I carried it with me in my note-book all through the war.

"What sort of a stamp is it?" cried the boys.

"I'll send it to you and you'll see. It's a fine stamp. But it's of no use to me now since I don't collect stamps any more. I have one for you too, Andrei. I shall send it to you as soon as I get home."

"I am afraid there are going to be a good many more stamp-collectors in our class from today," I remarked to Shura on our way home.

"I shouldn't be surprised," he admitted with a chuckle.

"By the way, what sort of stamps are you going to give the boys?"

"Now then, a secret is a secret. I see you're just as inquisitive as your boys. You must wait and see."

THE LITTLE ONES

A week later Shura left, taking Vova Sinitsin with him. But our friendship with the children's home did not end there. One of the following Sundays Lyova and the boys who had not been with us the first time made a trip to Bolshevo.

They were given a very cordial welcome. "The matron invited us to come as often as we liked," Vyruchka told us afterwards. "And the children didn't want to let us go."

A few weeks later a group of boys went to the Bolshovo home, taking picture-books and coloured pencils for the children. The link with our new friends grew gradually stronger and stronger. The children became quite attached to my boys, who always came back from their visits to Bolshovo with amusing stories about their little friends.

"You know what Yegor asked me last time?" Labutin related after one of the visits. "He wanted to know whether Hitler had a tail!"

"Valya showed me a drawing she had done and when I asked her why there were three suns in it, she said: 'To make it warmer!'" said Savenkov.

"And when Ludmilla Ivanovna scolded Mitya for disobeying her, he said: 'It wasn't me who disobeyed, it was my shadow.'"

There were fifty children in the home; the youngest was three, the eldest—eleven. Some had been brought from the Ukraine and Byelorussia by plane, others had been picked up on the Smolensk roads. One little girl had been found half-frozen in the forest, another had been brought from a Moscow evacuee centre. Not all of them could remember what had happened to them. Little Lyova Zotov, aged five, told his own tragedy in these simple words: "Mummy and I were running, then Mummy fell down. She closed her eyes and went to sleep. I tried to wake her, I shook her and shook her, but she wouldn't wake up." Taya, Vitya and Vova Lyubimov were brought to the home by their father an hour before he was due to leave for the front with his unit. He never returned.

Ludmilla Ivanovna told us that at first all the children, even the youngest of them, had been very quiet and sad. They would wander listlessly about the house, or sit

motionless for a long time staring into space. They would not talk to anyone and toys and games did not interest them. The staff of the home were at their wits' end. The physical ailments of the children healed comparatively rapidly. But it was hard to comfort the little ones who cried for their mothers and fathers and the homes they had once known.

Neither the children nor the teachers cared to speak of what they had been through in this first period: it was all too painful to recall. But all of us, my boys as well as myself, saw how much loving care had been lavished on the children.

"People often pity me for having so many little ones to take care of," Ludmilla Ivanovna once remarked. "But I really don't find them any trouble. I think there is nothing nicer than a large family, especially when there are lots of little ones. They make a home so cosy. And we all take care of our little ones together. The older children would be much more difficult to handle if we had no tiny tots with us."

And it really was like a family, one big, noisy, happy family. And how different they all were! There were quiet children and talkative children, grave little girls who liked to scold ("Pavlik, you *are* a bad boy to leave your paint-box in such a messy state!") and mischievous little boys who were forever cutting their knees and bumping their noses or tearing their trousers on some nail or twig and keeping the matron busy mending.

We knew all about our little friends; we knew that Tolya was a chatterbox, that Lyonya loved to scrap, that Vera was a stay-at-home, and Zhenya hated his afternoon nap. When some Moscow family offered to adopt Zhenya Smirnov's little sister Sonya, we discussed the

matter at a class meeting and were much relieved to learn subsequently that Ludmilla Ivanovna had decided not to separate the two children.

We were not the only "patrons" of the children's home—all the collective farms in the district kept it well supplied with farm produce. This aspect of life in the children's home was of particular interest to our practical-minded Lyosha Ryabinin. He came back from one of his Bolshevo visits to report that the chairman of one of the local collective farms had deposited 35,000 rubles to the home's account, stipulating that it should be used to buy butter and other fats for the children.

"That's good," remarked Labutin. "Children need fats to make them strong."

"The Vperryod Collective Farm gave them the cow," Lyosha went on. "The piano, it turns out, was a present from the District Party Committee."

"They also got all sorts of toys and things from the District Executive Committee," Labutin informed us.

Their contact with the children's home taught my boys more about the Soviet attitude to people than any amount of talks and lectures could have done. I was very glad that chance had brought us into contact with this children's home and that it was occupying a place of increasing importance in our daily lives. We were the home's "patrons", the older friends of the children, who in their turn developed a warm attachment for us and looked forward eagerly to our visits. My boys were to the little inmates of the home what Anatoli Alexandrovich was to them. They knew all the children intimately, their characters, and dispositions, which of them were chums and which of them did not get along with each other and why. They were always trying to devise some

pleasant surprise for the little ones, and they took delight in recalling something amusing or clever the children had said or done. Tolya Goryunov was now genuinely enthusiastic when little Pavlik made a cardboard box all by himself, or when Lida learned to write her letters properly.

I could not help remembering the talks I had had with my room-mates in the Volga rest home, and the story Nina Stanitsina had told us about what her train crew had done for the little refugee children during the war. I had intended telling that story to my boys, but I doubted whether they would appreciate it properly, because they themselves had experienced nothing like it. Their friendship with the children's home taught them the satisfaction to be derived from doing good to others, from bringing joy to people. And this experience gave added meaning and purpose to the work of our Pioneer group.

Speaking with Young Pioneers about their work, Nadezhda Konstantinovna Krupskaya once said:

"Take an active interest in life. If you see something that is not right, change it. For instance, if you see that the children in the kindergarten next door to you seem dull and listless, make some toys for them. If you notice that some school for adults has not enough maps, make some yourselves. If your school canteen is dirty, have it cleaned. You must be interested in everything. Everything is your concern."

These sentiments were heartily endorsed by Arkadi Gaidar, a favourite writer of mine, and one who I am sure teaches a great deal not only to children but to adults as well. His book *Timur and his Squad* is not only good literature, it is a profound pedagogical study.

Children are active beings and it is very important to find some worth-while application for their energies. They must do something useful, see the fruits of their efforts, feel that they are contributing their small share to the common good.

My boys helped the children in the children's home to put out their wall-newspaper; they played with them and read aloud to them. They built a first-rate toboggan slide for them, mended all the skis and sleds, and, with Lyova's help, they repaired the radio which had been out of commission for a long time. Every Sunday some five or six boys went out to Bolshevo. And since they spent much of the time in the fresh air playing and romping with the children, these trips were most beneficial in many respects.

OUR BOTANIST

But how did it happen that the irrepressible Boris had not taken part in the review of stamp-collection? I shall tell you. Boris collected stamps as zealously and enthusiastically as everything else he did. He collected all sorts of stamps, anything that came his way. He was always giving his stamps away or exchanging them and continually adding to his collection again. One day he struck on a truly brilliant idea.

He happened to hear that the Moscow Botanical Gardens received packets of seeds from all parts of the world. Now, these seeds came in envelopes which undoubtedly bore foreign stamps. And so Boris decided to go to the Botanical Gardens and make friends with some gardener or botanist there (or better still with their children, for surely they must have children!) and put the matter to them. "I am a philatelist," he would say. "Your garden

gets letters from all over the world. Those letters have stamps on them. You don't need the stamps. Couldn't you let me have them?"

Actually it all turned out quite differently. One fine August day Boris entered the Botanical Gardens. He had never been there before and what he saw caused him to forget the purpose of his visit completely. He went about examining the flowers and plants and after a while he attached himself to a group that was being conducted through the gardens. And when he finally spoke to the guide it was not to ask him about stamps at all but to inquire whether the Botanical Gardens had a section for school naturalists.

That happened during the summer holidays and when September came round we soon realized that we would have no peace until we had paid a visit to the Botanical Gardens. Boris could talk of practically nothing else. He himself managed to go there twice a week and he took two or three of his classmates with him each time. Later on, in the winter, I too went there with him.

The gardens were deserted and looked rather desolate that day. The temperature had suddenly risen, the fresh snow had melted and turned black and the bare branches of the trees looked bleak against the low grey sky. But Boris, marching happily down the path, appeared quite unconscious of the dreary scene. He led the way to the hothouses and opening the door with a proprietary air invited me to step in.

The air inside the glass house was pleasantly warm and slightly dank, like the air beside a stagnant pool. It was strange to come from the wintry street into the midst of such a mass of bright green vegetation. There was something bear-like and clumsy about the shaggy

trunks of the palms which contrasted oddly with the green fan of leaves spreading wide and free like a heavy jet of water from a fountain. The jagged leaves of the Japanese laurel were flecked with yellow spots like splashes of sunlight. The cactuses looked amusingly important; one tall and slender, another crooked and misshapen as though it were stretching out a pair of knotted arms to us; and a third round and bristling like a frightened porcupine. That was the best of them all.

Boris led me along the rows of plants, describing each one to me in the manner of an experienced guide.

"This is a tisswood tree. It is almost extinct in Europe. Lives up to fifteen hundred years. Its wood is very strong and is reddish inside. Unlike all other coniferous trees it has no resin." Glancing over his shoulder to make sure that no one was looking, he furtively patted the twig nearest him. "See, its needles are quite soft, they don't prick at all. Feel them. Of course you're not supposed to touch the trees and plants as a rule, but if you do it gently it can't hurt them."

I asked questions and Borya answered with undisguised pleasure at our changed roles.

"This is a Schoenus. Its resin is used for making rope. The leaves are used in ointments for boils and swellings. This is a Drimys, and this is a Krestovnik. . . ."

The school librarian had her hands full these days supplying Borya with books on plants. But the botany teacher was delighted with him.

"He has a remarkably thorough knowledge of the plant world," she told me. "I don't think this is a passing phase with him. I believe the boy has found his true calling."

"I do not want to disappoint you," I said, "but last year by the same token I was convinced that he would specialize in geography."

"No, no, that boy is a born botanist," Elena Mikhailovna insisted. "He has a genuine enthusiasm for the subject and perseverance besides. That is very important."

As for Borya's mother, botany was the least harmful of her son's interests. She could never forget what had happened the year before: Borya had just learned to patch rubber galoshes and since there were no torn galoshes around on which to test his skill, he was about to punch a hole into a brand-new pair belonging to his elder sister, when he was stopped in time. "I wouldn't have spoiled it," he protested. "I would have glued it up again and it would have been better than new."

Now Borya had taken possession of all the windowsills in the house for his precious flowers and plants. True, our budding botanist was forever getting into trouble with his sister, for he watered his plants so zealously that he sometimes spilled water on to her desk which stood by the window.

"It's not enough to water the soil," he would explain when she protested. "The leaves have to be washed as well. The leaves have pores and the plant breathes through them and if they get clogged up with dust the poor thing can't breathe. How would you like your nose and mouth to be all stuffed up?"

He did all his school- and home-work in botany with great zest. One day he came to school looking downcast.

"Anything wrong at home?" we asked him.

He nodded gloomily, and after some persuasion told us the story. Their botany teacher had given the class some home-work: to determine the effect of warmth on

oat seeds. Borya, who had a passion for all kinds of experiments, wheedled three plates out of his mother, filled them with moist sawdust and planted about twenty oat grains in each. He put one plate in a corner of the pantry, another under his desk, and the third under the radiator in the living-room. The object of the experiment was to find the temperature in which the seed best thrives. A week or ten days was all the time required. Borya, however, had bad luck with his experiment. The very first day a neighbour dropped a pot on the plate in the pantry, and Borya's father stepped on the one near the radiator. The only survivor was the plate under his desk. Borya begged his mother for more plates to experiment with, but she refused. I tried not to smile as I listened to this sad recital, but the boys roared with laughter. At first Borya looked daggers at them but then he too saw the joke and joined in the merriment.

The next day Savenkov brought him two wooden bowls. "There. You can step on these all you like and they won't break," he said.

And that is how it came about that Borya lost interest in his stamps for a while. . . .

AN APPLE OF DISCORD

Shura kept his secret to the end.

"Dear friend Marina," he wrote, "I am sending the stamps I promised Andrei and Kira. I think they will be pleased. Let them unseal the packets themselves—it will make them feel very grown-up and important. You don't mind, do you?"

The next morning I handed Kira and Andrei the packets.

"These are for you from Alexander Iosifovich. I wonder what treasures there are inside."

The boys crowded around the collectors.

"Hurry up and open them, quick!"

But the two stamp-collectors handled the packets as slowly and cautiously as if they contained not a small scrap of paper but a ball of mercury that might slip out and scatter into hundreds of tiny elusive fragments.

At last Andrei drew out his present—a large black stamp with the figure "60" engraved on a velvety background.

Morozov flushed with pleasure. He sat admiring his stamp, oblivious of the eager boys around him.

"Brazil!" Borya announced.

The boys crowded closer to peer at the new stamp. Everyone admired it greatly. Now all eyes were turned to Kira. On his palm lay a tiny brown unperforated stamp with a white eagle in the middle of a blue oval.

For a moment we thought that Kira had been slighted. Andrei's stamp was so big and handsome, and this was small and not at all attractive. But then Kira, almost speechless with excitement, stammered:

"Marina Nikolayevna ... look at it! It's the first Russian stamp! I'd never, never be able to own a stamp like this. ... Why, it's terribly valuable. Just imagine ... It's ... it's ..." words failed him.

"There, there," I said soothingly. "That's fine. We are all very glad that you have such a wonderful stamp. And now take your seats, everybody, the bell's just gone."

Kira walked over to his desk in a daze.

"Wake up, or I'll pinch you," Lukarev said, as Kira sat down still looking starry-eyed.

Kira started and looked around him. Then, with a

glance at me, he slipped the stamp between the leaves of his copy-book.

There was a teachers' conference that day and it was nearly nine o'clock by the time I left school. I was walking along engrossed in my thoughts when a familiar voice reached my ear.

"You can have any one you want from my collection."

I looked up to see two boys walking ahead of me. One of them walked with a slightly awkward gait, his hands thrust into his pockets, looking uneasily from side to side. The other, trotting smartly alongside, was talking volubly and waving his mitten under his companion's nose. I pricked up my ears.

"But I don't want any of yours, I don't collect foreign stamps."

"Well, then, just say what stamp you want and I'll get my papa to buy it for you."

"I don't want any. Why can't you leave me alone?"

"Kira! Andrei!" I called to them. The boys turned. "What are you doing out so late?"

"Morozov came to my place and asked me to go for a walk," Kira replied in a flat voice.

"That was a good idea. It's a lovely evening for a walk. But what is the argument about?"

The boys did not reply and I changed the subject to school matters. I asked Kira when his little sister was expected home from hospital. Kira, who always liked to talk about his family, gave half-hearted replies.

"Well, I must hurry along," I said. "I have a heap of exercise books to correct tonight. Good-bye!"

Two days later Savenkov, who was walking home with me from school as usual, remarked:

"Morozov won't give Glazkov any peace. He keeps

nagging at him to exchange stamps with him. He wants the one Alexander Iosifovich sent Kira."

"But why? I thought he didn't collect Russian stamps."

"That's what Kira said, but he says he's going to start now. We told him to let Kira alone. Kira didn't have a stamp like that when he began his collection. 'You start collecting first,' we told him, 'and maybe something like that will come your way too. Kira doesn't ask you for your Brazil stamp, does he?' But he won't listen. He wants that stamp and he won't hear of anything else. The envious thing!"

One evening a few days later Tatyana Ivanovna knocked at my door and smilingly announced that "a young man" wished to see me.

I opened the door to find Kira outside in the hallway twirling his cap in his hand shyly.

"Why Kira, how nice!" I said. "Come in, come in. Is everything all right at home? Has Sonya come back?"

"She's coming home tomorrow, Dad and I are going to fetch her. Marina Nikolayevna," he said all in a rush, "I came to ask your advice about something."

"I'll be very glad to give it, Kira."

Hurriedly and not too coherently Kira poured out his trouble. As I had suspected, it was about Andrei Morozov and his insistent offers to give Kira any stamp he wished in exchange for the rare stamp Shura had sent.

"But why should I exchange it, Marina Nikolayevna? I've always longed for a stamp like that. I've wanted it ever since I first saw it in the shop, but it was far too expensive for me even to dream of buying it. Morozov says his father will get me any stamp I want if I give him

this one. Let his father buy stamps for him. Why must he have mine?"

"You must tell him firmly that you don't want to exchange," I said.

"He keeps telling me I'm selfish and greedy," Kira said in something like despair. "He says I'm a pig to begrudge a stamp to a schoolmate. He says he won't talk to me any more. I asked my Dad what to do but Dad said it's for me to decide. He said I must do as I think best. Well, I've decided I'm not going to exchange with him, and I don't care whether he thinks I'm a pig or not," Kira burst out in one breath. He had forgotten his shyness and looked straight into my eyes as he waited for my verdict.

"I think you are right," I said.

"I'm not greedy, am I, Marina Nikolayevna?"

"No, Kira, I know you're not. Borya showed us all the stamps you gave him."

"Lukarev keeps telling me not to listen to Andrei, and to hold on to the stamp. It was he who told me to see you about it. He came with me. He's waiting for me downstairs."

"Why didn't he come up with you?"

"He's shy. I was too, but he said I had better go up because I had come on business, but he hadn't, so he stayed downstairs."

"Now you run down at once and tell him I said he is to come upstairs. No, wait..." I went to the door and called Galya. "Galya, dear, put on your coat and run downstairs. You will see a boy there in a black fur cap. It's Lukarev. Tell him to come up here at once."

"Lukarev!" cried Galya. "Fedya?"

"Yes, yes, now hurry!"

"Right away!"

Galya had her coat on in a twinkling and in a few moments she was back with Fedya. I invited her to join us and she brought her favourite guessing game, Vertolina. It turned out that neither of the boys knew how to play it and Galya was only too happy to show them.

"See this disc with the opening in it? You spin it round and when it stops you'll see a letter through the opening. Look, I'll spin it. It's a 'C'. Now all those cards have questions on them. You take one of them and see what it says. 'A metal mined in our country'. What metals are there beginning with 'C'? I know. Copper. There is copper in our country, isn't there?"

"Of course there is," Fedya confirmed.

"See, it's easy. Now what does this card say: 'Fish found in the sea'. You have to think of a fish beginning with the letter 'C'."

"Cod," said Kira.

"Good. There are all sorts of questions for each letter on all subjects, about nature, minerals, and about people. Only you mustn't think too long, you have to answer right away. The one who answers first scores. Shall we play?"

"All right," the boys replied a trifle uncertainly. They had listened with undisguised awe to Galya's explanations and I could see that they were very anxious to make a good showing.

Galya twirled the top smartly and reached out at once for the cards:

"A composer. It's a 'B'."

"Beethoven," Kira replied with relief.

"Good, that was quick. Now 'L'. What do you need for a walking-tour?"

"Legs. . ." Fedya answered falteringly.

Kira and I laughed.

"There's nothing to laugh about," Galya rushed to his defence. "He's quite right. Try and go on a walking-tour without legs! Name an object used in the home. Now here's an 'S'."

"Soup," declared Fedya, catching the spirit of the game.

"Silly!" said Galya. "Soup isn't an object, it's food."

"I know, a saucepan!" Kira put in.

"'N'. What do you like most about your neighbour on the left?"

I glanced at Kira, whose face as he waited open-mouthed for my answer, was a study.

"His neatness," I said.

The boys were vastly amused. Kira's "neatness" was a by-word in the class-room.

After a while I took up my work and the boys went on playing for a long time. Now and again I paused to listen to them. I noticed that occasionally Galya surprised the boys by her quick-wittedness, but of course being several years younger she couldn't think of a part of a ship beginning with "Q" ("Quarter-deck," said Lukarev) or name some character from ancient mythology beginning with "H" ("Heracles," "Hercules," my boys shouted in chorus). And she was obviously much impressed when, in answer to a question about a famous historical battle, Fedya replied: "Austerlitz."

To the question "Name one of your failings beginning with the letter 'L'," Kira replied unhesitatingly: "Laziness."

"And what about you?" Galya said to Fedya.

Fedya wavered. "I haven't any beginning with 'L'," he said finally.

"Any other letter will do!"

"Come on, own up," Kira urged.

"Oh, everyone knows mine," he said.

"Who for instance?"

"Marina Nikolayevna," said Fedya in a low voice, with a mischievous glance in my direction.

The two boys left my place in high spirits that evening. But the stamp incident was not yet closed.

"A SPLENDID IDEA!"

The boys had a guessing game which they often played during the long break. They would form a circle and the boy in the ring would call out "Animal, Bird or Fish!" several times and then point suddenly at one of the players who had to name some bird, animal or fish, while the leader counted up to three. No name could be mentioned more than once. It was an exciting game. Most of the boys quickly exhausted their knowledge of the animal world and fell out of the game. And then the contest grew sharper still.

"Puma," cried Rummyantsev.

"We've had that one before."

"Lynx!" shouted Volodya, in a desperate effort to stay in the game.

"I said lynx already," protested Tolya.

Seryozha Selivanov alone had an answer ready each time the finger pointed at him.

"Touraco!" he shouted.

"What's that? There is no such bird!"

"Yes, there is! It belongs to the cuckoo family."

Or:

"Cho."

"Go on! You're just making it up!"

"No, I'm not. It's a red wolf. He is a little smaller than the common wolf and has red fur like the fox. And his tail is long and fluffy too like a fox's."

Seryozha's zoological "rarities" caused so much surprise and disbelief that after a while he began explaining them at once without waiting to be asked.

"Bird!" cried the leader.

"Emu!" Seryozha replied, adding hastily: "It's like an ostrich and it lives in Australia."

"Animal!"

"Sivuch! Sea lion. A huge one. Sometimes weighs as much as nine hundred kilograms. Four metres long, three metres round."

Once, when asked to name a bird, he surprised us all by saying: "Blue bird!"

"That's only in fairy-tales," Goryunov objected.

But Seryozha averred that the blue bird did exist. It belonged to the thrush family and had feathers of a purplish blue, and it lived in the Caucasus among the snowy mountain peaks. "It likes the snow. In winter it comes lower down but in the summer months it stays high up in the hills."

Seryozha was never at a loss for the name of some animal, fish or bird. Indeed, he not only knew their names, but was thoroughly versed in their habits and behaviour. Seryozha's father was a hunter and the boy had spent all his childhood in the country. Ever since the family had moved to town Seryozha had waited impatiently each year for the coming of summer when he could go to the country again. He was always in his element when we went mushrooming in the woods in summer, and during our ski outings in winter. He knew all about

mushrooms and picked far more than anyone else. Once, on one of our outings, he pointed to a hare's tracks in the snow and told us how to distinguish the tracks of different animals.

At first Seryozha had been rather ashamed of his passion for dumb creatures, imagining that other people thought it foolish. To counteract this impression I brought him a copy of the book *Children and Their Pets*. He was delighted with it. He told us in great excitement that he once had a dog exactly like the one described in the book. "I thought I was reading about our Trezor!" After that I gave him Durov's memoirs and books by Prishvin, Jack London and Seton-Thompson. Seryozha read them all and wrote brief outlines of their contents in our Blue Book (a new one by now, but also in a blue binding).

One day in class when we were talking about proverbs, Seryozha said:

"Not all proverbs are correct. For instance, people say: 'However much you feed a wolf he will always look to the forest'. But wolves don't only live in forests. They live in marshes too, and in the steppes and in deserts—anywhere, so long as there are domestic animals about. And the saying: 'Fighting like cats and dogs' isn't true either. Our Trezor, for instance, was great friends with our tom cat Vaska."

No one in class recited with greater feeling Nekrasov's verse:

*Sasha wept when they cleared the wood.
When she remembers she sheds a tear
For all the wonderful trees that stood:
Oak-trees and birch-trees and firs austere.
Gone are they all and the wood is gone,
Only the memory lingers on.*

As he recited, Seryozha would gaze out of the window and I felt sure that he was vividly picturing the scene Nekrasov described.

"Marina Nikolayevna," he said to me one day. "Do you like cats? You don't? Oh, but why? They're so nice and they're very clever really. You ought to see our Vaska. He likes Mum better than anyone else in the family. He always meets her in the hallway and follows her around just like a dog and rubs himself against her and purrs. He's awfully clever too. He has even learned to stand on his hind legs and beg. We taught him in four days. We didn't beat him or punish him, we just petted him when he did what we wanted. And he never steals anything. You can put milk in front of him, or meat even, and he won't touch it. He just blinks and turns away and pretends it isn't there."

Like all people with some all-absorbing interest Seryozha loved to talk on his favourite subject and the boys never grew tired of listening to his "animal stories". Whenever I gave the class free choice of a subject for composition Seryozha wrote about animals or birds.

It was after examining Kira's and Andrei's stamp-collections and listening to all the talk about stamps that Seryozha came out with his proposal.

"Let's all collect stamps together. The whole class!"

"Classes don't collect stamps," said Morozov. "You have to do it on your own."

"But why? I'll collect stamps with animals on them."

"A zoological collection," I observed.

"That's right!" Seryozha said, throwing me a grateful look.

And before he could say any more the others had seized on the idea with enthusiasm.

"I'll collect plants," Borya Levin cried. "Kirsanov can start an artists' collection. D'you want artists, Dima?"

"There aren't very many stamps like that," said Dima doubtfully but his eyes were alight with interest.

"All right, artists and musicians then," Kira intervened. "That ought to be enough. There are all sorts of artists series—Repin, Surikov, Chaikovsky, Rimsky-Korsakov. And I've seen stamps with Shishkin's *Bears*, done in several colours, just like the painting."

"That's a splendid idea!" declared Lyosha and began jotting down themes:

Great Patriotic War.

Great Men of our Country:

1) Writers, artists, musicians.

2) Scientists, inventors, travellers.

Aeronautics.

Architecture.

Sports.

Botanical Gardens series.

Animal series.

I approved the idea, but suggested that besides collecting the stamps and pasting them into albums, each stamp be supplied with a commentary.

"Say you have a Nekrasov stamp. Under it very briefly you should give some facts about the poet's life: the date of his birth and death, and the titles of some of his poems. If you have a stamp with a tree on it, write down where the tree grows and anything else about it worth mentioning. If it is a building—say where it was built and what you know about it."

"And then we'll read our albums to one another," Boris caught up.

We decided to make the stamp albums ourselves

Large sheets of drawing paper, lined and bound together, would do perfectly. The albums would be kept in Lyosha's cupboard.

The next day I came to class a few minutes before lessons began. Morozov got up from his seat when he saw me.

"Marina Nikolayevna, I have brought a stamp for the class collection," he said proudly.

It was a Tuva stamp, a very colourful one with the picture of an amusing, surprised-looking squirrel against a bright green background.

"That's to start with!" cried the boys. "Good for Morozov!"

"A squirrel? That's my department!" said Seryozha, delighted.

"It was your idea. You may as well start the collection," I said.

"I wonder what Glazkov brought?" said Tolya mischievously. "I bet it's a bear."

"Perhaps he didn't bring anything at all," teased Lyosha. "For all you know he's forgotten all about it."

"No, I haven't," said Kira.

He caught my eye and came over. Carefully he drew the stamp out of its tiny envelope and laid it on my desk.

"What is it? What has he brought?" the class buzzed with curiosity.

Before I had time to say anything, Gai in the front row right opposite my desk cried out in amazement:

"Look, it's the first Russian stamp! The one Alexander Iosifovich sent him!"

The class was struck dumb with amazement. This was the stamp Kira had refused to part with, the stamp that had caused so much passion and strife.

"You shouldn't have," Lyosha said at last.

"Why not?" said Kira in a hurt tone.

"You need it yourself."

"You think I should only part with things I've no use for myself."

"But it isn't nice to give away presents," Lyosha argued. "It was a present from Alexander Iosifovich and you have no right to give it away."

I looked at Kira. His face was a study. Joy at the knowledge that he had the moral right to take the stamp back struggled with doubt and uncertainty and gratitude to Lyosha for his sound argument. He turned such a deep shade of red that his fair eyebrows looked white and his slightly pointed ears were the colour of his Pioneer tie. His lips quivered. I hastened to his aid.

"Yes, Kira," I said, "this is a very fine stamp and extremely valuable besides, but it doesn't fit into any of our series. And you need it for your own album. Take it back. It's very kind and generous of you just the same."

"Then I'll bring . . . I'll bring Mayakovsky, Rust'hveli, Chekhov and Nekrasov for Dima."

"That's splendid. And now Fedya will come to the blackboard and tell us what he knows about Korolenko."

As Fedya Lukarev rose from his seat and made his way to the front of the class I glanced at Morozov. His face was clouded and he was biting his lip.

THE NEW BOY

"Lyova won't be able to come to our Pioneer meeting today," said Ryabinin. "He is writing a composition for his literature class."

We all knew what that meant. Lyubov Alexandrovna,

the literature teacher in the senior forms, was very strict. We knew how thoroughly Lyova and his classmates prepared for her class. Before writing a composition Lyova would read everything he could find on the subject, giving a great deal of thought to his outline, sometimes taking counsel with me and always striving to think of some interesting and original introduction. Neither he nor any of his classmates in the senior form would have dared to put down a stereotyped phrase, for Lyubov Alexandrovna was scathing in her ridicule of anyone who resorted to ready-made formulas instead of thinking for himself. As for copying from the text-book or from some introductory articles on the subject, that was altogether out of the question. Never was her scorn so withering as when she caught a pupil trying to pass off someone else's ideas for his own.

In one of his compositions the previous year Lyova had used the stock phrase "wholly and completely". He still remembered the lecture Lyubov Alexandrovna had given him on that occasion. "I'll never forget it as long as I live," he told us.

Lyubov Alexandrovna was very strict with her pupils. At times she seemed quite harsh. But they never took offence, because behind the biting words they sensed a genuine respect for their abilities and a desire to make them do their best. She would hardly have been so severe if she did not have confidence in them. After all, you cannot demand more of a pupil than he is capable of giving.

Lyubov Alexandrovna and I often met on the boulevard in the morning on our way to school. It was a ten minutes' walk and we had plenty of time to exchange views on our favourite subject. "Let me tell you about a

youngster in my class. . . ." Or: "I wish you could see the composition your Sasha Gai's elder brother handed me the other day."

Today, too, we had had a good talk and had just reached our corner when we met the postwoman.

We offered to take the school newspapers.

"Anything else?" I asked, as she handed me the bundle of papers.

"Yes," replied the girl and gave me a postcard.

I glanced at it in some surprise.

"It's for you, Lyubov Alexandrovna. Who could be writing to you at the school address?"

"For me? Strange. I wonder who it is from?"

She stopped and ran her eyes over the card. As I watched her, angry spots appeared on her cheeks, and the furrow between her dark eyebrows deepened.

"Look at this," she said quickly and handed me the card.

The postcard began abruptly:

"I am the father of your ninth-form pupil Vladimir Gorchakov. My professional duties prevent me from coming regularly to school to inquire in person about my son, and I am therefore obliged to rely solely on his weekly reports to get some idea of his progress. I find, however, that throughout November and the early part of December my son's report card has not even been looked at. Yet you teachers reproach parents for not taking an interest in their children's school work. I insist on knowing what you have to say on this score, so that I may decide what steps to take in future."

For a moment I stood staring at the yellow postcard covered with the careless scrawl and the flourishing signature in the lower corner. I did not know what to

say and I could not bring myself to hand it back to my colleague.

At home that evening I switched on the radio, opened the drawer of my desk and began to tidy it. I laid aside my brother's letters—I rarely read them now—threw out some unnecessary papers that had been lying about for a long time, and finally from the back of the drawer I pulled out a packet of letters from Anna Ivanovna and began reading them through one after another until I found what I wanted.

It was a letter I had received from my old teacher nearly two years before, on graduating from the institute. "... I shall not deliver any parting sermons to you," she wrote. "I don't intend to give you any advice. You know yourself all that I could tell you, and your work will teach you a great deal more. I only want to say this: always remember that to be a teacher is something to be proud of. Never lose your self-respect. Let no one behave rudely or tactlessly toward you; if you do, you will be degrading not only yourself, but your noble calling. Be firm when you know you are in the right, and preserve your dignity. Do not forget that you are a teacher and he who follows that calling has every right to be proud of it."

Those words were just. But it is one thing to realize the worth of dignity and another thing to be able to defend it. What was Lyubov Alexandrovna to do about that postcard? What would I have done in her place? I did not know. . . .

* * *

After the winter holidays a new boy came to our class. His name was Valya Lavrov. He had fair hair and blue eyes and a little mole on his cheek which set off his

delicate complexion. He astonished me from the very first by the calm assurance with which he expressed opinions on all subjects. What judgements he passed from the supreme height of his twelve years! Once, looking over a copy of *Literaturnaya Gazeta* he had brought from home, he remarked casually to Lyova:

"Marshak's translations of poetry aren't at all bad."

"Pretty good, if you ask me," said Lyova matching Valya's tone.

"I daresay you're right," Valya reluctantly agreed.

The boys were listening curiously to this grown-up, intellectual-sounding conversation. It may have been brutal of me, but I could not help asking:

"What translations of his have you read, Valya?"

There was a pause. There are pauses and pauses. This one was too long not to have compromised Valya. He flushed hotly, while Goryunov with a mischievous smile recited Marshak's translation of "Rub-a-dub-dub, Three Men in a Tub."

Everyone laughed. I was sorely tempted to point to the danger of repeating other people's words indiscriminately. But I said nothing. I felt that Valya had been sufficiently punished.

The new boy further impressed his classmates by riding to and from school in a shining light-grey automobile of a make that was still a novelty at the time. The boys crowded round the car discussing its superlative qualities with great zest. Boris was particularly excited, he declared that, compared with this car, all the other models were hopelessly out of date. He inspected the handsome gleaming body from end to end and even crawled under it for a closer examination. He emerged dishevelled but beaming and shook the snow off his cap.

"How does she run?" he asked Lavrov.

"Like a dream," replied Valya, opening the door with a flourish. "Step in and ride with me to my house."

Borya did not need to be asked twice. Three other boys piled into the car with him. They looked forward to a nice long ride to the other end of town. They were cruelly disappointed: three minutes later the car pulled up in front of a large familiar house which many of them passed twice a day on the way to and from school. This was where Valya Lavrov lived.

The boys came back to school dumbfounded. Of all things—he lived round the corner from school and they sent a car for him!

From that day they gave Valya no peace.

"Hey, Lavrov, will you walk to the canteen or are you going to wait for the car? How will you manage to get to the blackboard on foot. You'd better tell them to send the car for you!"

To do Valya justice he was extremely good-natured about it. He never took offence at these jibes or retorted rudely. But he did feel a trifle uncomfortable.

Something else happened to damage Valya's reputation. When his turn came round to be class monitor—one of whose duties is to sweep the class-room—the astonished boys, watching from the doorway, discovered that Valya did not know how to go about it. He held the broom as gingerly and cautiously as if it were not an ordinary wooden broom but a razor, and instead of sweeping the dust away from him he swept it towards him. That was too much for Labutin.

"Hey," he shouted in disgust. "Is that the way to sweep?"

Valya blurted out some remark to the effect that he wasn't a girl and he didn't intend to go in for housewifery, but in our class such talk was out of date.

"Clumsy ass!" said Savenkov. "All you're good for is riding around in motor cars."

It gradually came to light that this self-assured boy who talked so smoothly and glibly was by no means a brilliant scholar. With difficulty he managed to keep at the level at which "threes" can very easily turn into "twos".

"Ask your mother to come and see me, Valya," I said to him one day. "I would like to have a talk with her."

Observing the questioning, worried look on the boy's face, I hastened to explain:

"You see, you are very much behind in arithmetic. We have decided to help you. In any case, I should like to meet your mother. I know the parents of all the other boys, but I have never met yours. So if your mother has time, I should be much obliged if she would come and see me. Will you tell her?"

"Of course."

The next day he came over to me in the corridor and looking past me, he faltered: "Mama said . . . Mama said, if you want to talk to her you can call her up on the telephone."

I must have reddened, but I controlled my anger and said:

"I have no telephone at home. And it is so noisy in the office here that you can't hear anything. I asked your mother to come so that we could have a quiet talk here where no one could disturb us. But she is busy, you say? Does she work?"

"No, she doesn't. She is at home. But she says she hasn't any time to come to school."

Nevertheless a few days later she came—a tall, handsome, well-dressed woman with a dark mole on her delicate pink cheek exactly like Valya's. She looked me over with frank disdain.

"You asked me to come? Is anything wrong?"

I told her that Valya was behind the rest of the class and that he often came to school without having done his arithmetic home-work, or with the wrong answers.

"That only shows that the arithmetic teacher does not know her business," was Lavrova's caustic comment.

"Our arithmetic teacher is very experienced," I said. "Her pupils like her subject and have no difficulty in grasping her explanations. The trouble is that Valya has not had time to catch up with the others yet. That is because you didn't put him to school as soon as you moved here from Leningrad."

"Why doesn't the teacher stay behind with him after lessons if she sees that the child isn't sure of himself?"

"She has done so on more than one occasion," I replied, feeling that I was about to lose my temper. "But it is important for someone at home to see that he does his lessons properly and to make sure that he doesn't drop them the minute he comes up against some difficulty."

"Don't you think you could have told me all this over the phone?"

"No. I think that parents and teachers ought to become acquainted. Don't you?"

She shrugged her shoulders.

"It seems to me that it is also your duty to keep an eye on the boys' attitude to one another. But you seem to forget that. I gather that Valya's classmates have been teasing him about being driven to school in a car,

because he has announced that he will walk to school in future."

"I think he is doing right," I replied. "Sometimes he waits a good half-hour for the car when he can walk home in ten minutes. After all, you live so near the school."

"I fail to see that it is any business of yours!" Lavrova exclaimed.

Controlling myself with difficulty, I said quietly:

"I would ask you not to use that tone to me!"

"I see it is of no use talking to you at all," she declared and sailed haughtily to the door, her every movement expressive of her supreme contempt for the little chit of a girl who had dared to force herself on her notice.

Oh, if only I could have given rein to my feelings at that moment and behaved like the little chit of a girl she thought me, how I should have enjoyed giving her a piece of my mind! But the door slammed and I stood motionless, grasping the back of the chair with all my might.

The next day Valya came up to me during the first break.

"Marina Nikolayevna," he said turning a furious red, "Mama wants to transfer me to another school. But I don't want to go! I like it here and I shan't go anywhere else! Do tell her, please!"

"No, Valya, I cannot dissuade your mother from doing what she sees fit."

"Do you want me to go away?" he said in a hurt tone.

"Certainly not. We like you and we want you to stay with us. But you will have to take it up with your parents yourself."

"Papa is in Leningrad, and Mama. . ."

"Look, Valya, if you want to stay, try and explain to your mother that you have grown used to the class and the teachers and perhaps she will allow you to stay."

I don't know how he managed it, but Valya remained with us. The boy continued to interest me. I have already spoken of his habit of repeating the opinions of adults, and of the aplomb with which he made his statements. His conversation fairly bristled with platitudes he had picked up and memorized, such as "Tennis is a patrician sport" or "Art beautifies life". Coming from him they sounded most ridiculous, to both adults and classmates.

Again and again I recalled that conversation with Valya's mother and each time my blood boiled at the memory of it. I thought of what she had said about the attitude of the children among themselves. "You seem to forget that," she had said.

No, I had not forgotten. But I doubted then, as I do now, whether it is right to interfere too much with children, to try to correct or influence them. Is it wise to let children feel that they are constantly being watched over? Even if they are not conscious of such surveillance it is bound to introduce an artificial element into their lives. Children are highly sensitive creatures, and I strongly believe that they ought to be left more to themselves. The case of Valya Lavrov showed me once again that I had been right in this respect. Nothing I could have said to Valya, no amount of lecturing and scolding ("Don't repeat what other people say." "Why do you talk about things you don't understand?") would have been as effective as his classmates' attitude to this weakness of his. They knew when to laugh at him, when

to maintain a frigid silence, when to cut him short with some sharp retort, and in this way they showed him how ridiculous he made himself when he expressed opinions on matters of which he clearly knew nothing.

"On the whole the Spartak team plays a pretty dull game," he had the misfortune to remark once in his customary airy manner.

He got it that time! The boys pounced on him at once, Spartak and Dynamo fans alike. They showed him that he didn't know anything about football, that he couldn't tell a centre-forward from a half-back, that he knew none of the players in the Spartak team and, horror of horrors! he had never heard of Homich.* In a word, poor Valya's exposure was complete! After that, he must have seen for himself how little his grown-up talk impressed the boys. Nor could he fail to notice that they always listened with genuine interest and respect to Goryunov, Ryabinin, Kirsanov and Gai, although they never used his long words or grand phrases.

"PROFESSIONAL DUTIES" AND THE SCHOOL

I was in the office of our head mistress, Ludmilla Philippovna, some few days later discussing our plan of work for the third quarter, when there was a loud knock at the door.

"Come in," said Ludmilla Philippovna.

There entered a tall, stoutish man of about forty with light hair turning grey and an air of confidence and quiet assurance about him.

* Famous goal-keeper of the Dynamo football team.—*Tr.*

"My name is Gorchakov," he said.

"Sit down, please," our head mistress invited.

I got up to go but Ludmilla Philippovna detained me. "Please remain," she said, and turning to her visitor she added: "This is Marina Nikolayevna Ilyinskaya, one of our teachers. Marina Nikolayevna, Comrade Gorchakov is the father of one of our boys."

Gorchakov! Where had I heard that name before? As I resumed my seat, searching my memory for some clue, I saw Ludmilla Philippovna handing her visitor a postcard.

"You wrote this postcard to Lyubov Alexandrovna, did you not?"

So that's who it was! I had a swift vision of Lyubov Alexandrovna's face, flushed with anger and resentment.

"Yes," he admitted.

"Have you ever met Lyubov Alexandrovna?"

"No, I'm afraid I haven't. The only time she visited us I was away from home. You asked me to come and see you. Is it about my son?"

"No, Comrade Gorchakov, it is about you."

"Me?" He both sounded and looked surprised.

"Do you remember what you wrote on this postcard?"

"I have some idea. I don't think there was anything out of the ordinary in it."

"Do you mind reading it again?"

He ran his eyes swiftly over his own handwriting.

"Would you say that your professional duties prevent you from breathing, eating or drinking?" the head mistress went on in a voice of suppressed anger. "You would not. It is natural and necessary for a person to breathe, to eat and to drink no matter how busy he is. Is that not so? But you have a son. Is it not just as

natural and necessary for you to bring him up? Is your responsibility for his progress any less than his teacher's? Isn't it essential for you to meet that teacher in person?"

I glanced at Gorchakov. He looked puzzled.

"You write that you are too busy to visit your son's school. Lyubov Alexandrovna has three classes, that makes a total of one hundred and twenty pupils. When she goes home she has a heap of exercise books to correct, compositions to read, seven and eight pages long, not to mention the next day's lessons to prepare. Yet Lyubov Alexandrovna found the time to come and see you. What about yourself? How many children have you?"

"Volodya is our only child. . . ."

"I see. An only child. . . . Do you think it is any more difficult for you to come to school than it is for Volodya's teacher to go to your house?"

"Very well, I agree. I wrote that card on the spur of the moment and I may have been a bit brusque. I apologize. But why didn't Lyubov Alexandrovna enter any marks in the boy's report card?"

"Because she was ill in November and December. Your Volodya knows that as well as I do. But that isn't the point. A teacher can make a mistake. Her work is by no means easy. But surely whatever your professional duties you could spare a few minutes to come to school and have a talk with the teacher? Or at least follow the rules of common politeness when you write to her. But in this case there was no mistake."

I noticed that Gorchakov winced each time she mentioned his "professional duties". He began to look sheepish.

"Incidentally," she went on, "why do you say that the report card is your only means of verifying your son's progress? It is simple enough to ask the boy what marks he got. After all, he is not a child, he is in the ninth form. Or do your professional duties leave you no time to ask your son about his school work?"

"Ludmilla Philippovna, spare me please! My professional duties have nothing to do with it. The trouble is . . . er, you see, I've noticed that Volodya doesn't always tell the truth lately."

"In other words, you don't believe what he tells you. All the more reason why you ought to have come here to school and had a talk with Lyubov Alexandrovna. Well, take my advice and go and see her about this at once. She knows all her boys very well. Have a talk with her as soon as possible, don't postpone it. You know what Rust'hveli said: 'Lies are the source of all misfortune, lies are the beginning of all torment'. We teachers know how true that is. By the way. . ."

At that moment the door opened and I was called to the telephone.

"Marina Nikolayevna," said the head mistress as I excused myself, "I think you had better come to me about the plan tomorrow. I shall be engaged with this comrade for some time."

I shook hands with Gorchakov and went out.

An hour later as I was passing down the corridor I saw him come out of the head mistress' office. He looked thoughtful and preoccupied. I saw him go over to the time-table for the senior classes and jot down something in his note-book.

"I wish Ludmilla Philippovna would have a talk like that with Valya Lavrov's mother," I thought with a sigh.

STEP BY STEP

Valya was quite a problem. I had never come across a child with so many conflicting traits. He was an amazing combination of arrogant self-assurance and an utter lack of confidence in his own powers and abilities.

Called upon to answer in the geography class he would stop suddenly and falter: "I don't remember any more."

"Think a little. I'm sure you can remember if you try," Alexei Ivanovich would urge him quietly.

"No, it's no use, I simply can't. I have a very bad memory," the boy would insist on the point of tears.

"But you memorized the first half of the lesson well."

"Yes, but I've forgotten the rest. It's no use, I know I shan't remember it. . . ."

It was clear that at such times the green, brown and blue patches on the map had merged into one meaningless blur for him and that he really could not distinguish the Black Sea from the White. I should never have been able to manage him had it not been for the combined efforts of the other teachers.

Sitting in at an arithmetic lesson, for example, I observed how Lidia Ignatyevna, the teacher, handled him. She gave the boys a problem to solve and while they set to work, she walked up and down between the desks. At first Valya tackled the sum with the same zest as the others. But presently he pushed aside his exercise book and began drawing something on his blotter. Lidia Ignatyevna noticed this and went over to him.

"Why aren't you doing your sum?"

"It doesn't come out," Valya replied glumly.

"Nonsense. It must come out. Use your head."

"I have. But it doesn't help."

Lidia Ignatyevna picked up his exercise book.

"You began very well," she said. "Now check the subtraction once again. . . ."

Valya set to work again. Now and then he looked up at Lidia Ignatyevna and she nodded encouragingly. . . .

I liked to attend Lidia Ignatyevna's classes. Her lessons were always most interesting and instructive for me. Although this was her first year with the class I could see that she knew the boys very well, for she had found the correct approach to each one of them. She often helped Savenkov and Lavrov with their problems, but she never tried to help Levin or Goryunov even if they were in difficulty. She was sparing of her praise for Morozov but never grudged words of encouragement to Vorobeiko or Rummyantsev. After every more or less difficult problem she would ask whether any one had found some other way of solving it. If so, she would ask the class which method was the correct one. And no boy would risk making a random choice because he would be instantly told to prove it. It was impossible to remain a mere outsider at her lessons. I often caught myself solving the problem on the blackboard in my head or searching for some other solution and trying to discover why it was better than the original one. Everyone in Lidia Ignatyevna's class had to think for himself and be prepared to answer any moment.

Perhaps the most difficult task for a teacher is what Makarenko defined as "planning the good in the human being", which means determining the positive traits in a person, his talent and ability, and helping to develop them, nurturing the first healthy green shoots and inducing the person to believe in them. That was precisely what Lidia Ignatyevna did.

I was not at all sure that Valya would be able to solve the problem and he was clearly even less confident than I was. I saw his face darken again. He sighed and laid aside his pen, but could not sum up the courage to call on his teacher for assistance. But presently she came over to him, bent over his desk and said in a low, gentle tone: "Stuck again? But you nearly had it solved. Look. All you have to do is to convert the tons into kilograms, and then. . ."

"Just a minute, I think I've got it," Valya interrupted.

Lidia Ignatyevna had no doubt that Valya would solve the problem. And in the end he succeeded.

"I've got it! It's the right answer," he cried triumphantly a moment later.

Arithmetic was the first subject in which he caught up with the class, although it had been his weakest at the beginning. His half-surprised, half-triumphant: "I've solved it!" was heard more and more frequently, to which Lidia Ignatyevna always responded with quiet assurance: "Of course, I knew you could do it!"

In this way we all strove to strengthen up the child's growing self-confidence. At the same time we discouraged the slightest sign of conceit. This was by no means easy, for it is sometimes extremely difficult to find the correct approach in such cases, and one must take care not to upset the fine balance achieved with such difficulty, not to undermine the child's newly-acquired faith in himself. As I said before, this boy was a remarkable combination of contradictory traits and I therefore made a point of studying him as closely as possible.

* * *

One day Valya came to me with a complaint.

"Marina Nikolayevna," he said, "the boys won't leave me alone."

"Which boys? Ours?"

"No, from 5-A."

"What do they do to you?"

"They push me about and slap my head. . . ." He hesitated, then confessed: "Once they even made me cry. You watch them during break—they just won't let me pass."

"My dear child," I thought, "you ought to ask Borya Levin what to do in such cases. He would give you the right advice." Aloud I said:

"Very well, I shall talk to the boys."

I soon found that Valya had good cause for complaint. He had only to appear in the corridor for the shout to go up: "Lavrov's coming!" Whereupon two boys would dart out of the class-room next to ours and block his path, while the taller of the two got ready to thump him on the head. I saw Valya draw in his head and glance about him helplessly. I went over and sharply told the boys not to dare to touch him again.

"Why do the boys from 5-A keep annoying Lavrov?" I asked Borya.

"It's the way he jabbars, just like a monkey—so funny. But they don't wallop him hard, just give him a thump or two. It's his own fault for letting them do it. He ought to teach them a lesson."

I had no doubt that if Borya were in his place he would not hesitate to "teach them a lesson".

Three days passed without incident and, on the fourth, Valya came to me again and told me that Andre-

yev and Petukhov from 5-A had begun annoying him in the street. "Whenever they see me walking by myself without the other boys they run after me and make fun of me. They keep at me all the way to school. But if they see anyone of our boys, Ryabinin or Vorobeiko, they run away."

I could hardly tell the lad that he ought to give them a good thrashing, although that was the advice that suggested itself. Instead I said diplomatically: "You ought not to let them annoy you."

"I shan't. I'll get Vorobeiko to come with me to school."

"But what if Vorobeiko should get ill or something? Hadn't you better try to stand up for yourself?"

"I'll try," he said with a sigh, but I felt that he was still at a loss.

"If you only knew how scared they are of Vorobeiko," he added after a pause. "That Petukhov made off as soon as he saw him. And Sasha shouted after him: 'You keep your hands off our fellows or I'll thrash you!'"

Valya said this with great zest. He obviously saw nothing wrong in letting someone fight his battles for him.

Again I asked myself: ought I to interfere or not? Of course I could have gone to the class mistress of 5-A and asked her to call her boys to order. For that matter I could have called them to order myself. But I felt that would not be the solution. Of course, if this had been a case of sheer bullying I should have stopped it at once. But it was not that. Teasing Lavrov had simply become a sport. And his frightened helplessness merely added zest to the fun. On the other hand, the more he allowed himself to be pushed around in this way, the more he would be tormented.

A few more days went by.

"Well, Valya," I asked him finally, "do those boys still bother you?"

"No, I punched their noses for them and now they keep away from me," he replied, with a note of pride in his voice that suggested he would never again allow anyone to smack his head with impunity.

And were it not for the dignity of my position I would most surely have praised the boy for giving his tormentors the thrashing they deserved.

* * *

"I do wish you would let me join your handicrafts group," Valya said one day to Lyova, looking up at him with hope and uncertainty.

"Well, why don't you?"

"But I can't do anything."

"You'll learn. Levin and Labutin couldn't do anything either when they first joined. Levin wasted heaps of material before he learned. And you ought to see the book-shelf Ilyinsky made, the whole school used to come and look at it just for a laugh. It was so lop-sided the books kept sliding off one end."

"But Gai was good at making things, wasn't he?"

"No, Ryabinin was the only one who could do anything. The rest were no better than you are."

When Valya first came to the group Lyova gave him a simple task, like clipping a serial story out of *Pionerskaya Pravda* and pasting it on sheets of thick paper to make a book for our class library.

At first the boys crowded round Valya to offer advice. But Savenkov chased them away.

"What are you staring at? This isn't a circus," he said firmly and sat down beside Valya himself.

"Now let me show you how to do it," he went on grumpily. "See, this is the way. No, not like that, butter-fingers! This way, see? Now try it yourself." He saw to it that Valya did everything himself from start to finish; he cut out the clippings, pasted them on to the pages (he managed to get the glue all over himself in the process, even to the tip of his nose) and sewed the pages together. The result of his labours was not a model of neatness, but it was good and strong, the binder's zeal being evident in every stitch and in the way each cutting had been glued down along the edge (it was Lyova's idea not to spread glue all over the back of the clippings so that they would not get discoloured).

"You see, you only have to make a start," Lyova pointed out to Valya.

"My first book was far worse," Gai cheerfully recalled.

Valya looked at Sasha in disbelief.

"Honesty," Sasha assured him. "It was awful. There were great big dirty blotches of glue all over it. Lyova wouldn't even accept it, would you, Lyova?"

"That's right," Lyova confirmed. "You've done very well, Valya. Next time I'll have to give you something more difficult to do."

"It isn't as handsome as it might be, but it is sure to last a hundred years," was the elder Vorobeiko's final judgement on Valya's first effort.

A few days later Valya came to school with a piece of news:

"There's an exhibition on at the Pioneer House. They have a handicrafts group like ours."

The boys were much excited. They wanted to know what school had arranged the exhibition, boys' or girls', and what sort of articles they made.

"I tell you what! Let's all go there this Sunday!" cried Lavrov. This practical suggestion was his first contribution to the life of the small community, known as 5-C.

A VISIT TO THE PIONEER HOUSE

The very next Sunday we met at the corner of Stopani Street. We waited five minutes for the late-comers (the whole class turned up finally, last of all Kira Glazkov who came running up all out of breath), and lining up in pairs marched up the path to the entrance of the Pioneer House. We left our hats and coats in the cloak-room and went upstairs to the exhibition hall.

What a display it was! There were so many exhibits we didn't know what to look at first. There were some excellent herbariums, collections of minerals, models of ships and aeroplanes, all sorts of albums, and specimens of embroidery and knitting. We would have lingered long over the very first diagram board in the hall if Valya, with a proprietary air, had not led us over to a stand marked "School No. 7, Lenin District".

"This is the handicrafts group I told you about. They're in the fifth form just like us."

He pointed to a large board to which were attached hand-bound books in colourful bindings, models of boats, a tiny radio set made in a cigarette box, a little bird-box and a waste-paper basket.

A neat inscription showed how many Pioneers in the class had learned to make the various items exhibited during the past year.

"Aeroplane models—13"

(my boys looked at one another in dismay)

"hand-bound books—20"

(a sigh of relief: we had nothing to be ashamed of on that score)

"bird-boxes—26"

(Labutin: "Hm, we can do that too!")

"crystal sets—8"

(Rumyantsev: "Only two of us can do that!")

"put up electric wires—6"

(Levin: "We've only got one who can do that—
Ryabinin!")

"embroidery—7"

(Vorobeiko: "What next!")

"darn socks—30"

(Chorus: "That's a good one!")

"wash floors—the whole class."

The boys nearly howled at that, but I went on reading:

"Our group repairs all the visual aids for the school. . . .

"Our group made 19 waste-paper baskets for the junior classes. . . .

"Our group rebound 120 books for the school library. . . ."

The boys were silent.

"Well," I said, "you have learned to make bird-boxes and bind books too."

"And book-shelves as well!" declared Ilyinsky amidst general laughter. Everyone remembered his famous book-shelf.

"We know how to mend galoshes, and they don't say anything about that," Vorobeiko said stubbornly.

"But we have only twelve permanent members, while

their group includes all the Pioneers in the class," said Lyova thoughtfully.

We spent a long time examining all the things made by the fifth-form boys of School No. 7. Then we moved on to the other stands. We found that, besides embroidery and darning, the girls from the school next door to ours—no doubt we often passed them in the street—made aeroplane models, radio sets, did carpentry work no worse than the boys of School No. 7 and could do minor electrical repairs as well.

"I'm not going to sweep, it's girl's work!" "Why should I learn to sew, I'm not a girl!" "He can't do anything, just like a girl!" These and similar sentiments I still heard occasionally from my boys. But now they saw how mistaken they had been. It required intelligence as well as skill to build up a collection of minerals like the one exhibited by this girls' school; and their floating model of a motor launch was excellently made.

"They're in the seventh form," Labutin tried to console himself. But it was clear to all of us that the girls and boys whose work was exhibited here were a long way ahead of us.

Gradually the boys wandered off to view the exhibition on their own. Some turned the pages of the albums, some inspected the photograph displays, others gazed admiringly at the miniature radio set in the cigarette box.

"Do you know why they are better than we are?" Lyova said to me on the way home. "For one thing, because in their school everyone goes in for manual training, while our circle only has twelve members, at most. Secondly, they don't learn just for the sake of learning; they have made a good many things for the use of the school in general and not only for their own class."

A PIONEER "FACTORY"

I had hardly crossed the threshold of the school next day when my boys pounced on me in great excitement.

"We've decided that the first group will repair all the visual aids and the second group will bind books for the school library," Rumyantsev announced.

"Our group is going to make nineteen waste-paper baskets for the first form," declared Vorobeiko.

"But suppose they don't need any waste-paper baskets?"

There was a moment of consternation followed by a roar of laughter. We had been so much impressed by all the things School No. 7 had made that we were ready to copy everything wholesale.

After lessons the Pioneers had a meeting to discuss the new project.

"Let's have a factory," Labutin proposed, leaping up from his seat in excitement. "A real honest-to-goodness factory. Every Pioneer group will be a different workshop. We'll have a book-binding department, a carpentry shop. And then we can change about, the book-binding department can do carpentry and the other way round so that we will all have a chance to do different kinds of work. Let's call it our Pioneer 'Factory'."

"Good! And we can accept orders from the whole school!"

"And Lyova will be our director!"

"If you don't mind, I'll just be Pioneer leader as I've always been," said Lyova. "All right, Labutin, take this down."

"By the end of the year every Pioneer in our unit," Yura wrote in his firm round hand at Lyova's dictation,

"must know how to bind books, make bird-boxes and bookcases, darn socks and put up electric wiring."

A heated debate arose over the question of whether to include in the list an undertaking to learn to make crystal sets and build aeroplane models. After much



argument the meeting decided against it. It was further resolved to undertake the repair of maps for the rest of the school. There was a whole pile of old maps in the school-keeper's room. They were all torn at the folds and some of them were badly damaged. Ryabinin's team undertook to supply waste-paper baskets to the first form. It turned out that waste-paper baskets *were* needed—not nineteen, but four. (Savenkov had run downstairs to the school-keeper to find out the exact number.) Morozov's team decided to make black-out curtains for the two other fifth-form classes so that they would not

have to hunt for a dark room each time they wanted to show lantern slides.

And so one day after lessons the boys brought five large geographical maps into our class-room. A pot of glue and brushes of varying sizes and shapes stood ready on the table. The most dilapidated of the maps were laid out on the floor for the sake of convenience. Oceans, mountain chains, Arctic wastes and boundless green steppes spread out all the way from the door to the windows and from the blackboard right up to the first row of desks which had been pushed back as far as they would go to make more room. After the inevitable arguments Gai's team got to work.

I stayed on in the class-room, as I so often did, correcting exercise books. But I did not interfere with the boys and their chatter did not disturb me in the least.

Now and again I looked up for a moment or two to see what they were doing, and then returned to my books. Suddenly I became conscious that some change had come over the room: an unusual hush had fallen. I looked up. Lavrov and Gai were standing on chairs holding up a huge map, and the rest of the boys had paused in their work to look at it. The first fruit of the day's labours! It was a large map of the U.S.S.R. The deep blue of seas and oceans merged with the lighter blue of the class-room walls. I got up and went closer.

"Feel it, Marina Nikolayevna," said Dima. "It's all prickly."

He was right. The surface of the map was covered with tiny holes like wounds—traces of the little flags which had marked the scenes of past battles. The other boys came over and passed their hands over the map, as I had, stroking it with a thoughtful air.

I searched with my eyes for Gzhatsk and found it. Selivanov found Kiev. Valya, standing on the chair, trying to get a tight hold of his corner of the map, looked down pensively in the direction of Leningrad. I saw Boris' dark eyes come to rest on the deep blue of the Black Sea. His lips were pressed tightly together and his face was pale. I knew what each one of them was thinking at that moment. Selivanov's brother had been killed in the battle of Kiev. Valya's grandfather, an old Leningrad professor, had died during the blockade. Borya Levin's relatives on his father's side had all been killed in the massacres in Odessa.

A quarter of an hour after Valya and Sasha had finished their map the other maps were also ready. As they were still moist from the glue the boys did not roll them up but left them spread out on the floor and the desks, promising the cleaner to come early the next day to clear up.

"Alexei Ivanovich *will* be pleased," said Valya. "He'll have five maps as good as new. We'll mend some more for him, won't we?"

"Of course, we will," said Gai. "Now he'll have a map for every class-room."

"Of course," Lavrov caught up, "it's downright inefficient to keep shifting maps from place to place."

* * *

The handicrafts group continued to function. New-comers began by learning to carve simple objects out of wood, to handle a saw and a hammer. The more experienced made book-shelves, bird-boxes and radio sets. But the whole spirit of the group had changed. The boys felt that the school needed their work and the knowledge gave

added zest to their efforts. Our Pioneer "Factory", as Labutin had named it, became quite popular.

"I need another ash-can in the downstairs corridor," someone overheard the school-keeper say. "I'll have to get the boys from 5-C to make one."

Of course, ash-cans are rather prosaic things, and it is not much fun making them, but when you make them by special request, for the use of your own school, that is a different story altogether.

"Lyova," said Kirsanov one day. "Vera Alexandrovna wants us to mend some of her books for her. She has a copy of Gogol's *Evenings at a Village near Dikanka* which is in bad shape. May I bring it to the group?"

"Marina Nikolayevna, do you think your boys could make a book-shelf for my class?" Nina Petrovna, one of the first-form teachers, asked me. "We have no place to put our exercise books."

We got so many orders that we had to introduce a system—all requests had to be submitted to Lyova who decided whether to accept them and how long the job would take, depending on how busy we were. It must be said, however, that there was no longer any shortage of "deft hands", because we were all members of the group now.

I showed the boys how to sew on buttons, make button-holes and darn. They were most serious about all this for many reasons, not the least of them being that Anatoli Alexandrovich in one of his recent letters had assured them that sailors and soldiers must be able to do everything for themselves—sew, mend, wash and cook. A very weighty argument indeed. Moreover, the boys of School No. 7 and many others, whose work we had seen at the exhibition, could do all these things.

Needless to say, when it came to doing a job for the children's home the boys took special pains. For Soviet Army Day we made presents for all the children—fret-work designs, boats, attractively bound note-books, plasticine animals painted in various colours. The latter was Dima's speciality. He made charming horses with long graceful necks, floppy-eared cats, amusing rabbits, elephants and camels. And each gift bore a little tab with an inscription: "To Yegor Varenichev from Vanya Vy-ruchka", "To Svetlana Polyakova from Sasha Gai", "To Nadya Velichkina from Dima Kirsanov".

And so our visit to the Pioneer House exhibition had taught us that we had only to emerge from our own little school world to learn much that was interesting and useful. We found that fresh ideas and new friends would not come to us of themselves—we had to go out and look for them.

"WHAT IS HEROISM?"

"Coming! Debate on the Subject: What Is Heroism? Please Prepare!" A large poster with these words had been prominently displayed in the entrance hall of our school for two weeks.

The debate was sponsored by the Komsomol organization, but everybody was getting ready for it. There had been a run on the library for books about great men and the Civil and Patriotic wars, and in the corridors one heard snatches of conversation on the same subject.

"Will they let us go to the debate, Marina Nikolayev-na?" Sasha Gai asked me one day.

"I don't think so. It's for the older boys."

"Why shouldn't it be for us too?" Sasha was obviously hurt.

"The subject is too difficult for you, you see. In another couple of years you will be having debates of your own."

"Two years!" Sasha Vorobeiko put in. "I know Lyova's arranging this debate—he's in charge of all such things in his form. Why shouldn't we go and listen?"

... Club day came round and the assembly hall was packed. Apart from the senior-form boys, there were a good many guests: pupils from the girls' school round the corner and last year's graduates from our own school, who were now in college.

"The theme is too abstract," observed a lanky young man wearing over-sized horn-rimmed glasses.

"Not so much abstract as undebatable," said a stocky youth with alert grey eyes. "I cannot quite see how you can debate a question that hasn't got two sides to it. The answer is so obvious."

The bell rang and there was a last minute flurry of activity as some more chairs were carried in and late-comers hurried to take their seats. Gradually the hall grew silent and Yura Laptev, of the tenth form, ascended the platform.

Casting a casual glance round the hall, I noticed Tolya, Sasha Gai, Sasha Vorobeiko, Dima and Boris just inside the door. They were not looking at me, but I felt sure they knew I had seen them. They looked grimly determined not to allow themselves to be ejected from the hall.

"Lyova, look," I whispered, "the delegates from 5-C have come."

Lyova's first impulse was to get up and go over to the youngsters, but it was too late for the meeting had already started. In the meantime Laptev had come to the end of his speech.

"I have deliberately tried to be brief and of course I have not exhausted the subject," he said. "I believe we



ought to answer the question before us through our joint efforts. But I think there is one premise that is incontestable—an act of heroism is an act carried out in the name of a just cause, inspired by a lofty ideal."

No sooner had Laptev stopped speaking than a girl's voice rang out from the audience:

"May I ask a question?"

The speaker was one of our guests from the girls' school. She walked quickly up to the rostrum and spun round to face the audience.

"Imagine a house on fire," she said, breathlessly. "The flames are leaping high and the roof is just about to crash in. Just then a woman screams. Her child has been trapped in the burning house. You dash into the flames and at the risk of your life you make your way over the smouldering beams and finally you return, badly burnt, but with the child in your arms. Would you call that an act of heroism?"

After a brief silence a boy's voice, somewhat suspicious, piped up:

"I suppose so. But what's your point?"

"What I want to say is this—supposing one does this sort of thing just to show off? There *are* people like that, you know. Doesn't that show that the important thing is the act itself and its result and not what impels one to perform it?"

Until this point the audience had been listening in concentrated silence. Now, however, there was an outburst of voices; at first everyone spoke at once, then gradually one voice emerged and held the attention of the others. The owner of the voice, a tall, broad-shouldered youth, stood up at the far end of the hall. "Kuznetsov, from 10-A," Lyova said to me.

"I don't agree with that," he said, with indignation in his voice. "A person who is capable of performing some heroic feat only when he is in the public eye, would hardly risk his life when nobody was there to see."

The girl still stood at the rostrum.

"Take Stakhovich in *The Young Guard*, for instance," Mitya Gai, our Sasha's elder brother, chimed in from the

opposite end of the hall. "For him work in the Komsomol was simply a succession of festive meetings and conferences. He was good at that sort of thing. But when the real test came, he couldn't pass it. He wanted to be sure that the whole world would hear of his exploit, and he cracked up when he had to face the fascist hangmen alone. Why did he turn out to be a coward? Because the main traits of his character were conceit and vain ambition, because he always thought of himself first."

"Order, Comrades, order," Ludmilla Filippovna, who was in the chair, spoke up. "Ask for the floor, come up to the front and have your say one at a time."

A fair-haired youth with a high forehead wearing a neat blue suit got up.

"May I say something, Ludmilla Filippovna?"

"Maleyev has the floor."

Young Maleyev mounted the rostrum. He had graduated from our school last year and was now a college student.

"I don't agree with the main speaker when he says that true heroism can be displayed only by people with a progressive outlook on life. Take Savonarola, for example—he was a fanatic if ever there was one, he burned paintings by great masters and destroyed superb statues. But when he was asked to prove that he was right, he was ready even for the ordeal by fire. Neither the stake nor the gallows frightened him. He was prepared to suffer and die for his beliefs. Wasn't he a hero? Of course, he was. He was a fanatic, of course, but he sacrificed his life for his beliefs."

Maleyev's speech stirred up a veritable storm. Could anybody who risked his life be called a hero? The speeches that followed grew briefer and briefer.

"If I understood you right, you believe that even people who have no principles are capable of performing heroic deeds. Would a gangster who risks his life while practising his profession fit in with your definition of a hero?" somebody demanded of Maleyev.

It was now Lyova's turn to speak.

"Savonarola's grim and gloomy exploit is no inspiration to any of us. But we shall always admire the courage and heroism of those who have given their lives in the defence of truth. These have always been the foremost people of their time, men and women who championed the most advanced, progressive ideas. And that brings us back to the starting point of our controversy: heroism is something determined by the justice of the given cause. There is no heroism out of time and space—no heroism in the abstract. Only an act performed in a worthy cause can be called heroic."

"May I have a word?" Ludmilla Filippovna said. "All of you associate heroism with something momentary, involving risk to life. Is that really all that heroism implies? What about that great Russian revolutionary democrat Chernyshevsky? Wasn't his whole life a heroic exploit? All those long years in exile, in remote, wild, uninhabited country, his unceasing labours and his unbreakable faith in his convictions?"

"Give me the floor, please, Ludmilla Filippovna. That's just exactly what I was going to say," a tenth-form pupil named Orlov rose to his feet. "In my opinion the main speaker ought to have said something about ordinary, everyday heroism. What about the people of the Leningrad Elektrosila Works who kept working through the most difficult period of the blockade, even when their hands froze to the metal in the unheated

shops—and they not only worked but exceeded their plans too. Is that not heroism?”

“Of course,” cried a blue-eyed, fair-haired girl sitting next to me. “But again you are taking exceptional cases. I don’t think you could call good work under normal conditions heroism, could you?”

This gave the debate a new fillip. The girl’s views were shared by many of the others who got up to repeat time and again that they understood heroism to be associated with something exceptional, unusual, spectacular.

Now Anatoli Dmitrievich rose. “I shall not try to dissuade those who believe that the heroic must always be spectacular,” he said. “I shall only read to you a letter from a Komsomol girl who was awarded the title of Hero of the Soviet Union—Natasha Kovshova...”

He unfolded a letter he was holding in his hands and read:

“My darling Olga! It is a long time since I saw you last, and a great many things have happened since then. On October 15, 1941, I joined the army, and since February 11, 1942, I have been at the front. The winter was a hard one, and I took part in a great many battles, until on May 20 I was wounded in both legs and arms. I was lucky as usual: the wounds were minor ones with the exception of the left arm. The bullet went right through just above the elbow, damaging a nerve so that at first I could not move my fingers at all. I wouldn’t go to the hospital but preferred to stay with a convalescent company. Now I’m quite all right; the wounds have healed, only the scars ache, especially in rainy weather. But I don’t pay any attention to them. I’ve got back to work—sniping, you know. My friend Mashenka and I have trained quite a few young snipers. So our ranks

are growing with every passing day, and the score is going up too. . . . So many things have happened that you just can't put it all down on paper. . . ."

Anatoli Dmitrievich read the letter to the end.

Silence reigned in the hall. Everybody felt as if Natasha herself had taken part in the debate—and her word was a very weighty one indeed.

Suddenly the audience awoke to the fact that Lyova was still on the platform.

"Yes," he went on as if there had been no interruption whatever, "I believe that everything begins with ordinary, everyday things. We shouldn't wait for the extraordinary to happen—there are plenty of opportunities for all of us to be heroes in our own small way. What I am going to say now may seem irrelevant to some of you, but I think it has a bearing on this discussion. The other day the heating system went out of commission, as you remember. Anatoli Dmitrievich and a special commission set to work to find out the reason, and they established that someone had turned a valve with the result that a radiator was spoiled. One of our tenth-form boys did it, but when Anatoli Dmitrievich questioned us, the culprit did not have the courage to admit it. What will he do when life confronts him with a real test?"

This new angle was a surprise to all, and once again the argument flared up. Ludmilla Filippovna could hardly keep the youngsters in order. The girl next to me kept bounding up, swinging her arms excitedly and trying to make her voice heard over the general hubbub.

I glanced at my boys. They did not see that I was looking at them—and this time they were not pretending. Carried away by what was going on in the hall, they were drinking in every word that was said.

Did they understand it all, I wondered. Undoubtedly they did. Their wide-open eyes and eager faces betrayed genuine interest; as a matter of fact they seemed about to plunge into the argument at any moment.

Lyubov Alexandrovna summed up the discussion. She spoke very well. Her speech was concise and vivid. I particularly remember her closing words:

"Can we say that today's discussion has supplied the answer to all the questions we put to ourselves? Of course not. But we have given them some thought, and that is what is important. I would like to remind you that youth is the finest period of a man's life. Mikhail Ivanovich Kalinin impressed it upon us time and again that youth is the source of all that is radiant and good in one's life. For it is the years of our youth that determine our worth, our future value to society. I would like each one of you after this discussion to ask yourself: What sort of a human being am I? What traits must I foster in myself in order to live a worthy and honest life, in order to be strong enough to meet any ordeal that may confront me?"

AFTER THE DEBATE

The next day the boys of 5-C who had been present at the debate gave an excited account of what they had heard. The most voluble was Vorobeiko.

"The main thing was to decide what a hero really is. Maleyev said anyone who isn't afraid of death is a hero. But everyone shouted him down. And you ought to have heard what a wonderful speech Lyova made. He was the best of the lot!"

Shortly after the debate Alexandra Fyodorovna, the boys' history teacher, sent her daughter to me with a

parcel of maps of ancient Greece which my boys had done for her class.

"Mother is ill," the girl explained. "But she knows how anxiously the boys are waiting for their marks, so she went over their maps last night and marked them. She told me to tell you that she is very pleased with their work. Ten of them deserved the highest mark."

During the first break I handed out the maps to their owners.

"Here, Tolya, this is your Greece. It's a pleasure to look at. The colouring is very good. Your Peloponnesos is the colour of a newly-hatched chick. And look at the mark: 'Five plus!'"

Tolya reddened to the tips of his ears like a shy little girl—a tendency of his that had earned him the nickname of Tonya (a girl's name).

"Vanya Vyruchka? Here you are," I went on. "That sea of yours is a beautiful colour. How did you manage it? I remember when I used to draw maps I could never get such an even colour."

"Goryunov showed me how to do it," replied Vanya beaming. "It's quite easy. You scrape some of the lead from a blue pencil. You get a sort of blue powder. You just have to dip a piece of rag in it and smear it over the sea and you get a lovely even blue."

"That is a clever idea. Now where is Igor? His map is also among the ten best. Alexandra Fyodorovna made a special note of that. Dima, yours is excellent as usual. Well, you have all done well. Alexandra Fyodorovna is very pleased with you. I think we ought to arrange an exhibition of the best maps for her when she comes back to school."

"I'll do mine over again!" said Glazkov with a sigh.

He was one of the few who had got a "three" for his work.

"Tolya, will you collect the best maps?"

"I'm sorry, Marina Nikolayevna, I can't," was the unexpected reply.

"Why?"

Silence. The boys looked at one another. I glanced at Tolya. Again his face was crimson and he seemed on the point of tears, but he returned my searching glance steadfastly.

"Why?" I insisted. "Are you too busy?"

"No. One of us got a 'five' for someone else's work," he said in a low but distinct voice.

"Tolya," I said sternly, "that is a serious accusation to make. Are you quite sure you are not mistaken?"

"Perfectly sure."

"In that case, of course, we can't have an exhibition."

The boys began whispering among themselves. Vanya stood aside, red-faced and upset. Igor too was flushed and he sat frowning and biting his lips. Dima looked at Goryunov with knitted brows. Meeting my eye he seemed about to say something but changed his mind and looked away. "But they can't have anything to do with it," I said to myself. "They all draw so well." I waited a few minutes more. I felt sure someone would get up and confess.

But no one did.

* * *

"Who could have done it?" was the thought that haunted me now.

Each time I called someone to the blackboard, each time I corrected an exercise book, I found myself

wondering: "Could it be this one? Could he be the culprit?"

I examined all the maps carefully. Alexandra Fyodorovna had given "fives" to Kirsanov, Goryunov, Gai, Levin, Solovyov and five other boys who drew quite well. I could not suspect any of them. As for Vyruchka his drawing had attracted my attention as far back as the beginning of the previous term. Noting his neat, well-defined outline, I had said to myself: "That boy will be at the top of the class in mechanical drawing."

Of course, my boys had got themselves into scrapes before this. But until now I had merely to ask "Who did it?" for the culprit to own up at once, saying: "It was an accident, Marina Nikolayevna. I'm sorry", "I didn't mean to do it", "I don't know how it happened", "I didn't know it was wrong", or some such phrase depending on individual temperament and character. Rumyantsev had confessed at the time of the "spool" incident, and so had Seryozha Selivanov when he had broken the fish bowl in the natural history room. In fact, Seryozha was more upset by the accident than anyone else. He ran at once to the teacher and made a clean breast of it. Savenkov too had owned up when he spoiled our only plane. And one day, coming across the same mistakes in Lukarev's and Glazkov's dictations I asked point-blank:

"Who copied from whom?"

"I did," Fedya admitted with a sigh after a few moments' hesitation. "I wrote 'bamboo' right first, but when I saw Kira had only one 'o' I changed it."

Yes, they had always honestly confessed their sins hitherto. But now...

Meeting Tolya Goryunov in the library one day as he was carefully choosing himself a book to read, I said:

"Tolya, what boy in our class do you think would be capable of passing off someone else's work for his own?"

"I can't say," he replied, reddening and looking me straight in the eyes.

"But you must have a serious talk with the one who does it."

"I've talked to him. So have Sasha and Dima, but he says it isn't any of our business."

We stood side by side, each apparently intent on studying the catalogue. For a while I thought Tolya had dropped the subject, but suddenly he said:

"I have known about it for a long time. I always thought it a rotten thing to do but I didn't say anything about it. But ever since that debate I've been thinking it's wrong to keep quiet. I don't know why I feel that way because no one said anything about such things at the debate. But now I feel that it is not right to keep quiet."

"Yes," I said. "A dishonourable action should never be condoned. This is a minor offence, but it is dishonourable nevertheless."

"And minor offences lead to major ones," interjected the librarian Vera Alexandrovna who had been listening to our conversation.

"I WAS ASHAMED"

"Write this sentence: 'A long string of carts moved slowly over the dusty road; the carts creaked and swayed.' Now parse that sentence."

Igor Solovyov stared helplessly at the blackboard. He was obviously at sea.

"Very well. Draw a chart first," I said.

As Solovyov drew the chalk slowly over the board an idea suddenly struck me. His lines were very shaky and uneven, and his rectangle was quite lop-sided. Perhaps he was upset about something.

"Rub it all out and try again," I said.

But the second effort was no better than the first.

"Try using a ruler," I suggested.

The ruler did not help either. It was a most unsatisfactory chart.

I sent him back to his seat.

* * *

Just before the bell went I told Igor Solovyov to remain behind after class.

Forty pairs of eyes were turned on me. What had he done? Goryunov and Gai looked particularly concerned, Vanya was obviously worried. Solovyov looked surprised. But I did not let that deter me. As soon as we were alone I went straight to the point:

"Don't you think it's dishonest to let yourself be praised for work you did not do yourself?"

"Goryunov told you?" he asked quickly.

"No. I discovered the truth myself when I saw how badly you draw. Now, Vanya draws very well and your maps are always excellently done. So I drew my own conclusions. Now why do you do it?"

He twisted his lie and said nothing.

"He offered to do it himself. And I hadn't any time, so I agreed. And he did it."

"But did that happen only once?"

Another long silence. Igor wavered.

"Nunno. . . Not once."

"How often?"

"Whenever we had drawing for home-work. Botany. Maps for Alexei Ivanovich. And this ... this ancient Greece..."

I looked at him sternly and he hung his head.

"I am not going to tell you what a vile thing you have done, because you know that yourself. But what I don't understand is how you can face your classmates when your teacher praises you and everyone knows that the praise is not deserved."

"Nobody knew, except Goryunov and Gai. I think Kirsanov guessed."

"How did Goryunov know?"

"He was the one who taught Vanya to print and to get an even colour on maps. Vanya did his maps and mine the same way. Goryunov noticed it once and told me. But what business is it of his?"

"Why didn't you confess? Don't you know that in our class all the boys admit when they are in the wrong? Remember the time Selivanov broke the fish bowl? He went to the teacher and told her himself. Were you afraid of being punished?"

There was a long silence.

"I was ashamed," he said at last.

* * *

The next day I was free during the first two lessons. As I was approaching my class after the bell for the long break had rung, I saw Alexei Ivanovich coming out. I entered the room and halted on the threshold. The room was in an uproar. The boys were shouting at the top of their voices and waving their hands. It looked as if they would start using their fists any moment. Out of the confusion I caught a glimpse of Boris, looking red

and angry, his hair all untidy, of Solovyov, his face pale and wrathful, and of Tolya, with his chin sticking out.

"What is the meaning of this?" I demanded.

"Solovyov called Goryunov a sneak, and he got his head punched properly for it," Boris replied.

"Who punched him?"

"I did," Sasha Gai shamelessly admitted.

"Congratulations. That, of course, is the best way of proving your point. Igor, why did you call Tolya a sneak?"

"Because he went and told on me about the map."

I felt myself grow pale.

"Do you think I would lie to you?" I asked him.

"No," he replied after a moment's hesitation. He would not look me in the eye.

"I repeat what I said before: Tolya did not tell me anything. What's more, when I asked him, he refused to tell. I told you yesterday that I had discovered the truth for myself without anyone's help."

"If I had told Marina Nikolayevna I would be a sneak but I didn't tell anybody. Only Gai. I didn't even tell Kirsanov. He guessed himself," Tolya said in a low voice.

"If you want to know, in your place I would have told," said Kolya. "Not behind his back, of course, but out loud in the class-room in front of everybody. That's what I would have done."

"That's right. There's nothing 'sneaky' about it," cried Levin. "A sneak is one who goes about telling on other people behind their backs."

"That's what I told Tolya," said Sasha. "I think we ought to have talked to Solovyov first, and if he had re-

fused to give in, then we should have got up and told the truth in class."

"It's a shame," said Lyosha sadly. "Elena Mikhailovna always praised him so much for his drawings. And there you are!"

At that point Vanya Vyruchka, who had not said a word until then, spoke up.

"Igor isn't to blame," he said in a loud voice. "I did the drawings. He didn't ask me to."

"Rats!" said Kolya in disgust. "You're a fine one. You treat him like a baby."

"He's my friend," Vanya flared up.

"What of it? Goryunov and Gai and Levin are friends too. And I'm friends with Gai. But he doesn't do my sums for me, does he? And do you think Kirsanov draws Vorobeiko's maps for him? Besides, you're not proper friends either. He just orders you about and you do as you're told."

Vanya hung his head. The sudden hush was broken by Dima, who said:

"Solovyov always made fun of Lavrov's drawings and teased him about it. I once helped Valya with his botany drawing but he told Elena Mikhailovna about it right away, even though she didn't ask him. And I didn't help him very much either."

All eyes were turned again to Igor Solovyov. Slowly he lifted his head and said in a low, but firm voice:

"I'll do all the maps over again myself."

"Good! And now we've had our own class debate," Vorobeiko declared in a tone of deep satisfaction. "There's nothing like thrashing things out."

PIONEERS MEET

I had called on Volodya Rumyantsev to answer at the blackboard.

He had not learned his lesson and he stood shifting from one foot to the other, twisting a button on his shirt and even failing to find consolation in the sympathetic glances of his classmates.

"Why didn't you learn your lesson?" I asked him at last.

"I . . . You called on me last time . . . so I thought. . ."

"Yes, I know what you thought. When will you realize that you must do your lessons for yourselves and not for the teacher?"

"I know, Marina Nikolayevna, honest I do," Volodya cried in despair. "But you did ask me last time, so I thought. . ."

I told him to sit down, and called on Andrei Morozov to answer.

Andrei came to the blackboard and answered all my questions clearly and intelligently as usual.

"Very good. Sit down."

He marched back to his seat. I happened to look up from the register for a moment before he sat down and I did not see his face, but I noticed that his ears and the back of his neck were red, and he held himself very erect.

"Pleased with yourself, aren't you?" I heard Boris Levin remark with scorn.

"Of course, he is," I said. "Why shouldn't he be pleased to earn a good mark!"

"That's not why he's pleased, it's because Rumyantsev got a 'two'."

"Nonsense!" I said.

I looked at Morozov. He sat scowling, his lips pursed. I noticed that several other boys were looking at him with something like contempt.

"Sasha. Come to the blackboard, please."

Sasha Gai came forward and gave a brief outline of Nekrasov's biography and recited a few verses from the poem "Orina, the Soldier's Mother". I gave him a "five" and he went back to his desk followed by warm and friendly smiles from his classmates.

It was the last lesson of the day. Before long the bell rang and the boys as usual crowded round my desk to talk of this and that. I noticed Morozov standing nearby fussing with his satchel, shifting its contents this way and that. I saw that something was amiss. He was usually among the first to gather up his belongings and leave the class-room, and here he was rummaging in his bag as if he expected to find some treasure there.

I dismissed the others and soon Morozov and I were alone in the class-room. He was still fumbling with his satchel.

"Why do the boys say that you were glad that Rumyantsev got a low mark?" I asked him.

"It isn't true. I wasn't glad at all. It's just that Rumyantsev and I aren't friends any more. That's why he gets poor marks now. I used to help him and now he has to do his lessons by himself."

"But doesn't Tolya help him? And Sasha? Tell me, why aren't you and Volodya friends any more?"

"It is his own fault. He kept accusing me of being conceited. Says I jump out of my skin just to be top of the class. But that's not true. It's not my fault if I'm at the top of the class. It's ability that counts."

"I want to tell you something, Andrei," I said. "Do

you remember the composition I gave the class to write on the subject of 'My Friends'. Do you know that not one boy in the class wrote about you? Now, why was that? After all, you were friends with Volodya and Boris once, but now you have quarrelled with both of them. And, in general, I notice that you are much less popular with the other boys than you used to be."

"They're all envious of me."

"Shame on you! How can you say such a thing! Why should they envy you? Goryunov is a very capable boy and an excellent scholar, so is Gai, and they are not the only ones. Why does no one envy them? I didn't think you had such a low opinion of your classmates."

"What's more," he continued, ignoring what I had said, "they want to elect another Pioneer group leader. They say I'm no good. It's not fair, I'm just as good as anyone"

"So that's why you stayed behind," I said to myself. Aloud I said: "Very well. We shall hear what the boys have to say on that score at the next Pioneer rally."

* * *

It was a curious rally. After I had listened for a while, I asked:

"Perhaps you could tell me what this meeting has been called for?"

To which Sasha Vorobeiko replied: "There are some things we have to get off our chests."

The meeting began in the noisiest and most disorderly fashion.

"Our group is the worst in the class," declared Labutin. "My diary is empty, there's not even anything to write about."

"There isn't another group with lower marks than ours!" Vanya Vyruchka interposed.

"And nobody from our group was chosen for the school volleyball team," Lukarev cried indignantly.

Lyova had to call the meeting to order. "Andrei, if you don't conduct the meeting properly we won't get anywhere," he admonished the chairman.

"Order, order," Morozov said sternly. "Anyone who wants to speak must ask for the floor."

"I want the floor," said Vanya Vyruchka. He too looked very grave as he stood for a few moments collecting his thoughts. It was curious to see a stern expression on that saucy freckled face that seemed to be made for merry laughter. "Labutin is right," he began. "Our group is the worst. We never do anything interesting any more. We drew up a plan of work and outings, but what was the good of it? Look at the album Gai's group made for the eight hundredth anniversary of Moscow! And they all went to the Lenin Museum and to the theatre as well. They always have games at their rallies. And what about the ski trip Ryabinin's group made? Labutin, Lukarev and Vorobeiko went with them, they'll tell you all about it." ("It was smashing!" Sasha said.) "But we don't even have any meetings, let alone outings."

Vanya sat down.

"And it's all because Morozov doesn't care a hang about the group," said Sasha. "He only cares about himself, nobody else matters."

"Just a minute, let me have the floor," cried Labutin, springing up. "Everyone here says that last year Morozov worked quite well. Do you know why that was? Because he was chairman of the council, that's why.

That's the sort of job he likes, because everybody respects a council chairman. But a group leader isn't a big enough post for him. He always wants to be above everybody else. That's his business, let him be at the top if he wants to. But why should he hate to see anyone else at the top? Have you ever known Morozov prompt anyone in class? Now, Marina Nikolayevna, don't look so stern, please. I know prompting's wrong, and hardly anyone does it in our class any more. But that isn't what I mean. I mean to say, Morozov ... he ... well, he isn't like the rest of us. If he sat quiet and said nothing when we're at the blackboard trying to think of the right answer, that wouldn't be so bad. But he sits there smirking, all pleased with himself because he knows the answer and we don't, and just waiting for the teacher to notice him and ask him so he can show everybody what fools we are. And when someone else gives the right answer he doesn't like it."

"That's a lie!" Andrei shouted viciously.

"No, it isn't, it's the truth!" several voices responded.

"Prove it!"

I had never seen this disciplined, self-possessed youngster lose his temper before. He was hoarse with anger and red blotches appeared on his face.

"You can't prove everything," Labutin objected. "But everyone here knows I'm right."

"All right, I'll prove it to you, if you like," Sasha Vorobeiko took up the challenge. "At arithmetic the other day Lidia Ignatyevna told us to find another way of solving one of the problems she had given us. We all began working on it. Rumyantsev did the sum and asked Morozov to look and see whether he had done it right, but Morozov wouldn't even look at his exercise book. 'I

don't know myself,' he said. And the very next minute he held up his hand and said he's solved it!"

"Why should I do Rumyantsev's thinking for him!" Andrei retorted hotly.

"But he began it correctly. It was the same as yours. Why did you tell him you didn't know how to do it?"

"It's no use," growled Lukarev. "We've been all over this before."

Everyone began talking at once and Lyova had to quieten them again.

"All right, what is the motion, boys?" he asked them.

"Elect a new leader!" was the response.

There was a silence.

"Do you agree with what has been said here?" I asked Andrei.

"I agree that the group doesn't work well," he replied.

"Yes, but why? Let him tell us why it works badly," the boys cried.

"Why blame the leader for everything? I tried to get you to go to see *A White Sail Gleams*, but no one wanted to go."

Again an uproar arose. It turned out that everyone except Andrei had seen the film and more than once. But when they had proposed going to see *Timur's Vow* Andrei had not done anything about it because he had seen the picture.

"We want a new leader and that's all," Labutin summed up.

Rumyantsev, who had taken no part in the discussion so far, asked for the floor.

"I'm against the motion to remove Morozov," he said

much to everyone's surprise. "After all, this is the first time we have told him what we think of him."

"Who says it's the first time?"

"Well, we may have told him in private, but not like this, at a general meeting. Now he knows how we feel about it, I think we ought to give him another chance. If his work as leader doesn't improve we can elect someone else in his place."

Of course the storm burst out afresh. Labutin and Lukarev were violently opposed to the motion. Even Vanya, who was always ready to give everyone the benefit of the doubt, declared quite firmly: "Rot. No good will come of it."

At this point Vasya Vorobeiko spoke up:

"What's the matter? Isn't he a human being like anyone else?" This unexpected point of view was supported by Kolya Savenkov.

"I think he ought to be given a chance to show what he can do. We'll see. We can always elect someone else later on."

They put it to the vote. Four were in favour of electing a new leader, six voted against; not a very solid majority, but a majority nevertheless. At this point to everyone's surprise Sasha Vorobeiko, who had just voted against Morozov, rubbed his forehead thoughtfully and said:

"All right. Let him work." Then he turned to Morozov and added sternly: "And don't be an ass and take offence at all this. We're doing it for your own good."

As for Morozov, his face was very red and his lips were even more tightly compressed than usual, but his voice was almost steady as he replied: "Let's draw up a plan of work. Any suggestions?"

I stayed for a short while longer, and then I left with Lyova.

"Just think of it, Lyova," I said. "Sasha Vorobeiko lecturing Andrei Morozov! You must admit that a year ago we would never have believed it possible!"

"But do you think Andrei learned anything from tonight's meeting?" Lyova remarked thoughtfully.

"Oh, I am sure it was not all lost on him!"

TWO COMPOSITIONS

At the next Russian lesson I said to the class:

"Today I have brought back the compositions you wrote on subjects you chose yourselves. Some of you wrote about the summer holidays, some about winter sports. There are compositions about ski runs, football matches, and favourite books. But now I am going to read you two compositions on the same subject: 'Our Children's Home in Bolshevo'. Here is the first one:

"'It is only a few months since we first visited the children's home in Bolshevo, but since that first visit we have been so often that we feel quite at home there now. We have made friends with the children although they are all much younger than ourselves. They are all orphans, they have neither father nor mother. Marina Nikolayevna forbade us to ask them any questions about what happened to them before they came to the home so as not to remind them of their sufferings. But sometimes you can tell about such things without asking any questions. Little Tolya Popov has a number on his hand which was stamped on it when he was in a fascist camp. It is written in blue ink that doesn't wash off. Then there is Sonya and Zhenya Smirnov, they are brother and sister. Sonya is five, and Zhenya ten. Their mother and father

were killed in the war. They have been in the home for so long that they are quite used to it. Sonya even calls Ludmilla Ivanovna "Mama". I tried to teach Sonya to read but she is too small. She calls the letter "o" a ball, and the letter "e" she says is a "broken ball". Zhenya adores her and he is ever so kind to her. He is in the third form.

"One day a woman came to the home looking for a child to adopt. When she saw Sonya she took a fancy to her. "Let me have that little girl," she said, "she will be my little daughter." But Zhenya began to cry. He said he wouldn't let anyone take his little sister. "She won't be better off anywhere than she is here!" he said. But the woman begged Ludmilla Ivanovna to let her have Sonya and everyone was afraid Ludmilla Ivanovna would agree. But in the end she didn't and we were all so glad. I think Ludmilla Ivanovna was right in refusing. Home is the place where everyone loves you. Why should Sonya go if she is quite happy in the home and if her brother is there too?"

I waited for a few minutes after I had finished.

"And now here is the other composition," I said.

"The children's home whose patrons we are is housed in a large handsome building which once belonged to some wealthy merchant. Its fifty inmates, girls and boys, are surrounded with loving care and attention. Besides the home personnel—the matron and teachers—they are taken care of by the surrounding collective farms. The house stands in the midst of a pine forest and the surrounding country is very beautiful. The older children go to school, and the smaller ones spend their mornings in the fresh air and all day long the forest resounds with their happy voices. The boys in our class made a splendid

loboggan slide for them. We also made various gifts which pleased them very much.

"The home is a model of cleanliness and tidiness. The beds are covered with snow-white counterpanes, there are flowers on the window-sills and pictures on the walls. In the large hall stand a piano and bookcases full of interesting children's books. The children love to draw, and they have plenty of paints and coloured pencils at their disposal. In the evenings and at other leisure hours the teachers read aloud to the smaller children who love to listen to stories. When we come on our regular visits we also read to them. Their favourite story is Alexei Tolstoy's *The Little Golden Key*."

Again I let a few moments lapse after I finished reading.

"Now which of the two do you like best?" I asked.

"The first one!" chorused the class.

"Why?"

That was not so easy to answer. After a brief silence, Gai said:

"You can tell that the one who wrote the first composition has often been to Bolshevo and is fond of the children. The other composition is . . . it's rather cold. . . ."

"It's smoothly written, but dull," Boris added.

I examined the faces before me. Sasha Vorobeiko was beaming, his mouth spread out into a broad smile of satisfaction. His brother Vasya looked as though he could not believe his ears.

"Who wrote it?" Dima asked.

"The first one was written by Vasya," I replied. "The other one is Andrei's. I gave the first a 'four' because there are two mistakes in it. Andrei's composition merits a 'five' because it is very neatly written, without a single

spelling or grammar mistake. But I must confess that I like Vasya's composition much better. I agree with Sasha and Boris. There is very little warmth in Andrei's description of the home. He clearly has no particular feeling for his subject. It is very good to be able to write smoothly, but that is not enough. Andrei might have been writing about any children's home. There is nothing in it to suggest the Bolshevo home we know so well and the children we have come to love. Vasya tells us all about the children and you can't help feeling that Vasya is very fond of them. And that is a good thing."

Sasha Vorobeiko was terribly proud of his brother. At the next break he went around saying: "What do you think of Vasya, eh! Good for Vasya!" and patting his brother on the back.

Vasya himself was less pleased than surprised.

"That was a very good piece you wrote," Dima said to him. "I think we ought to ask Marina Nikolayevna to let us have it for our paper."

"Splendid idea!" cried Valya. "It's high time the life of our children's home was reflected in the press."

"'Reflected in the press!' Listen to him!" Goryunov mimicked, shaking his head sadly. "When will you learn to talk like an ordinary human being?"

But there was no malice in the remark and when Valya added: "No, I mean, that was a smashing composition Vasya wrote," the others heartily agreed with him.

"Andryusha," I asked Morozov after school that day. "Do you understand why the class liked Vasya's composition better than yours?"

"Yes," he replied, and turned away.

"So the lesson has not been entirely lost on you!" I thought.

WALKING-TOUR

And so our life flowed on, the days and weeks sped past so quickly that winter was over before we knew it.

March came around again and with it a letter from Anatoli Alexandrovich.

"My dear friends," he wrote. "Today I applied for furlough. I don't know what the answer will be, but if it is favourable I shall write and let you know. In any case I shall send you a wire before I leave. Good?"

My boys were delighted. The letter gave them something else to look forward to, for none of them doubted for a moment that this stranger from the Far North would manage to get leave to come and see them.

True, the word "stranger" hardly applied to Anatoli Alexandrovich now. By this time he had become a friend in the full sense of the word.

The spring exams were close at hand and we had decided to take a fortnight's walking-tour as soon as they were over. Ludmilla Ivanovna, who was now informed of all our plans, said that if our itinerary happened to take us through Bolshevo she could put us all up for the night. That settled the matter for us. We made a careful study of the map of the Moscow Region, especially the roads between Mytishchi and Bolshevo.

We planned the trip on the basis of existing standards for boys aged 12 and 13 which set the average pace at 10 kilometres a day at the rate of three and a half kilometres an hour, carrying a pack weighing not more than four kilograms. The boys consulted experts as to the best way to plan the itinerary and draw up timetables, what to take along and how to pack a knapsack. The school doctor was to examine the boys to decide

whether they were physically fit for such an expedition. Everyone was most enthusiastic about the idea. Even Dima, who knew in advance that he would not be allowed to go, took a most active part in the preparations.

The class broke up into groups. All the would-be hikers had to learn to draw road maps and to pack a knapsack properly. This last was not as simple as it seemed. When Lyova asked Lukarev to try, he put the mess-tin at the back and stuck the bread at the very bottom where it would have turned into a mass of crumbs in half an hour; as for the smaller items, he stuffed them in so haphazardly that five minutes later he could not remember where anything was. Lyova showed the boys how it was done, and each of them tried it in turn. Every boy acquired a mess-tin and a piece of old film (to help light fires with!). Each made himself a stout stick and marked it off by centimetres and decimetres so that it could be used for measuring.

Lyova gave the boys many useful hints.

"If you borrow anything from anybody on the march, be sure to return it as soon as you've finished with it; otherwise it will get lost. Another thing—anyone who takes part in a walking-tour of this kind must always be prepared to help local people in the villages they pass through. For example, if you see it is about to rain when you are passing a field of mown hay you must stop and help to remove the hay to the barn. Of course, it is too early for hay at this time of the year. But Pioneers must always be ready to lend a hand in any emergency—floods, fires, or anything like that."

Fires, floods! It was easy to see that my boys would have wished for nothing better than an opportunity like that to show the stuff they were made of. They weren't

afraid of fires or floods! Not them. The local population might rest assured that our Pioneers would rescue them from any calamity.

"Here is another rule," Lyova continued. "This applies to you, Lukarev, if you are thinking of taking your camera along."

"Of course, I am."

"Well, then, if ever you snap anyone on the way, whether grown-ups or children, and promise to send them a snapshot, mind that you keep your promise. Because too often amateur photographers go around taking snapshots of people and promising them a photo and then forgetting all about it, and that makes a very bad impression.

"And, of course, camping grounds must be left just as you found them. All traces of bonfires must be cleared away and any fire-wood left over should be piled neatly for the next traveller. I don't have to tell you how careful you must be to see that your fire is properly out before you leave, so that not a single spark is left to spread."

"Don't worry, we're not babies," Kira Glazkov said in a deep voice.

"Last but not least, remember the motto of the boys in Makarenko's wonderful book, *The Road to Life*, 'No whining!'" Lyova wound up somewhat to the surprise of his hearers. "No matter what hardships and discomforts you have to face on the road—rain, cold, mud, heat—you must never get downhearted and start complaining."

Labutin was elected to take charge of first-aid. He had proved himself expert in this capacity during our rambles in the country the previous year. We all remembered how skilfully he had extracted a nasty thorn that had embedded itself in Boris' heel. He had covered the

wound with iodine and bandaged it so well that the pale but bravely smiling Borya declared it "an artistic bandaging job, fit for a first-aid exhibition!"

Everyone wanted to be chosen to light the fires and no one wanted to be cook until Lyosha Ryabinin announced that he would take on the job "with the greatest pleasure". From the expression on several faces one could see that some boys realized too late that they had missed a first-rate opportunity. "Lyosha's a smart one," remarked Sasha Vorobeiko wistfully.

We were rather pressed for time: examinations were not far off and they were much more formidable than last year's. After all, we were preparing for the sixth form!

"I pity the people who will live a thousand years from now," Sasha Vorobeiko said mournfully as he worked for his history exam. "Think of all the history they'll have to learn!"

And besides history there was arithmetic, geography, literature, Russian and English. But, busy though we were, we nevertheless managed to spare the time to prepare for our tour.

MAY NINTH

"A telegram! A telegram for us!"

The Vorobeiko brothers came dashing down the corridor, Sasha in the lead waving a telegram which he handed breathlessly to me. It was addressed to "5-C" and read as follows:

"Arriving Ninth Leningrad Station. Please Meet."

An indescribable commotion arose. Although the boys had known that Anatoli Alexandrovich was coming and had been expecting him some time in May or June, his

telegram giving the exact date of his arrival made them as wildly excited as the advent of the football season.

"He's coming! Hurray! How shall we meet him? Where will he stay?"

The boys decided to march to the station in formation. "We mightn't recognize him, but he'll know us at once if we line up," they said, although each boy was secretly confident that he would recognize Nekhoda at once. Several of them offered to put him up—Gai, Ilyinsky, Lukarev and Kirsanov—and they had to draw lots. The honour fell to Sasha.

And so May Ninth turned out to be a dual holiday for us. Early in the morning the boys marched off to the station. Lyova bought platform tickets and they marched through the large echoing waiting-rooms and lined up on the platform. They all wore white shirts and red ties and stood smartly at attention as if on parade. They lined up in two rows, and as soon as Lyova gave the command "At ease!" those at the back began craning their necks to see if the train was coming. How eager and excited they all were! They kept looking impatiently at the station clock as if they would have liked to seize the huge hand and make it move faster. And all the other people waiting to meet the train regarded our group with curiosity.

At last the clock began to behave respectably and all heads were turned in one direction, as a hoarse whistle sounded in the distance. How jolly it is to meet a train!

With a great puffing and roaring the long-awaited train rolled in to the station and Lyova and I could barely keep the boys from rushing forward and mingling with the crowd. We did not know which carriage he was in so there was nothing to be done but stay where we were

and wait for him to find us. There were numerous tank-men, artillerymen and airmen among the passengers, but where was our sailor? The boys shifted nervously from one foot to another, eagerly scanning the faces of the passers-by. Our hearts leapt as a group of sailors approached, but they looked at us smiling, and passed by without stopping.

The train had nearly emptied out when a tall, broad-shouldered man in naval uniform appeared at the far end of the platform, carrying two large suit-cases. He caught sight of us, put down one of the suit-cases and waved. And before Lyova could say a word the boys rushed forward to meet him.

Anatoli Alexandrovich stood there shaking the little forest of hands thrust toward him, hugging those standing close enough, and smilingly surveying the flushed and happy faces upturned to his. I fear that his ears must have ached from our clamorous welcome, but he continued to smile the warm, good-natured smile of an elder brother who has come home to his family at last after a long absence. And, of course, the longer the absence the noisier and gayer the welcome. At last he said:

"Now, let's unload one of these suit-cases. It's a bit too heavy to drag around any more. . . ."

The lock clicked, the lid opened and the gifts were distributed then and there. What a wealth of treasures that bag contained! There were little pictures of northern landscapes, cartridge-cases, real military map-cases, book-marks of walrus bone. There was a gift for everyone, no one had been forgotten. Lyova and I each received a paper-knife with the figure of a seal carved on the handle. Every gift was met with squeals of joy. Before long everyone had a little parcel, and the suit-case was

empty. Sasha Vorobeiko, fairly bursting with pride, picked it up and carried it, trying to keep in step with Anatoli Alexandrovich who was at least twice his height. ("Oho, you *have* grown—you'll be a real sailor!" And at this approving remark Sasha seemed to grow another couple of inches before our very eyes.)



We escorted Anatoli Alexandrovich to his hotel ("I'd better put up there, I wouldn't want to inconvenience your family," he had said gently but firmly, much to Sasha's disappointment) and said good-bye, but not for long. Later on we met him outside the school and took him up to our class-room. He walked straight in as if he was quite at home here, and without waiting for our explanations he began to examine our wall-newspaper, our exhibition, our stamp-collection. Even the cupboard where we kept the things we made ourselves did not escape him. He accompanied his "tour of inspection" with brief, humorous comments.

"Not a bad shelf, but the drawer is just a little lopsided. Whose work? Well, look at this! So you have

learned to saw as well. Good lads! But why so few models?"

Somehow we all felt as if we had always known this sailor with the slow, easy gait, the smiling light blue eyes, the quick, good-natured smile; even his firm young face slightly pitted by smallpox and with a web of fine wrinkles on the red, weather-beaten skin seemed remarkably familiar and dear to us.

After a while the boys moved the desks together, formed a circle around Anatoli Alexandrovich and settled down to listen wide-eyed to his stories, for he turned out to be a wonderful story-teller with no end of fascinating yarns to tell.

In the evening we showed him round the city, and later, standing close together on the embankment near the Moskvoretsky Bridge, we watched the golden, green and crimson lights of the holiday salute—the third in honour of Victory Day—light up the sky over the Red Square, over the Kremlin and over the placid waters of the river.

* * *

And that brings me up to the present. It is evening. I am sitting at my desk with its little heap of exercise books, and the lamp under its green shade throws a bright light on the pages of my diary. Again I recall the past two years, yesterday's holiday, our friend's arrival and his exciting stories, the walk through Moscow and the salute.

There are some difficult days ahead. The examinations are not far off. We are worried about Lyova, we are so anxious for him to get a gold medal! To offset the difficulties there is Anatoli Alexandrovich's promise to let the boys take him to visit our children's home. And

last but not least there is our walking-tour. Shura has promised to come to Moscow for his vacation, and perhaps I shall be able to persuade him to accompany us. Yes, we have many new, interesting and exciting things to look forward to. But again I find myself looking back.

My thoughts turn once more to my boys. I think of Vasya with the wish that he might grow up to be a striking personality. I hope that Andrei's vanity will not prevent him from seeing life, school and his comrades in the proper light. I want Borya Levin to come to school less often with bruised knees and a bleeding nose. I want Sasha Vorobeiko to think less of football and more of grammar and geography. I want Dima to find a bosom friend; I wish that Valya's character may harden and Lukarev's soften. I want all my boys to become real Soviet people, straightforward and true, staunch in the face of trials; I want them to be tireless enthusiasts in their work and always to place above all else their duty to their country and their people.

How pleasant it is to want these things, and to work for them! Every well-written composition, every cleverly solved problem in arithmetic is a source of deep joy to me. I rejoice in every new addition to their store of knowledge. And I grieve at their failures.

But what have I myself gained in these two years? How have they enriched me? What have they taught me?

It is difficult properly to assess all that I have gleaned for myself in this period, but there is one thing I know for certain.

One of Gorky's tales of Italy tells of a father and son who are overtaken at sea by a storm. The waves toss their little barque about pitilessly, and the land recedes farther and farther into the distance. Seeing death star-

ing him in the face, the father begins to tell his young son all that he has learned from life, about people, and work. Being a fisherman, he told him first about his trade, seeking to transmit to his son everything he knew about the habits and behaviour of fish. Then he went on to talk about people.

The wind howled, the waves beat against their faces, and the old man had to raise his voice to a shout so that his son could hear him.

"Never approach a man thinking that there is more bad than good in him; believe that there is more good in him and you will always find it to be so! People give no more than is asked of them."

The son survived the storm and throughout his long life he remembered with gratitude his father's wise words.

I too recall them. To love and understand. Always to look for the best in people, child or adult. To teach and to learn at the same time. And if you love your pupils they will love and trust you in return and all will be well. Then you will overcome the greatest difficulties, find the key to the most closely locked heart and you will be happy, very happy indeed.

For happiness lies in serving others. Who, then, can be happier than a teacher?

A gardener's gift to the future is the gardens he has cultivated, a writer leaves to posterity his books, a painter—his pictures. A teacher lives on in his pupils, in their thoughts and actions. That is his life's work, his small share of immortality.

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